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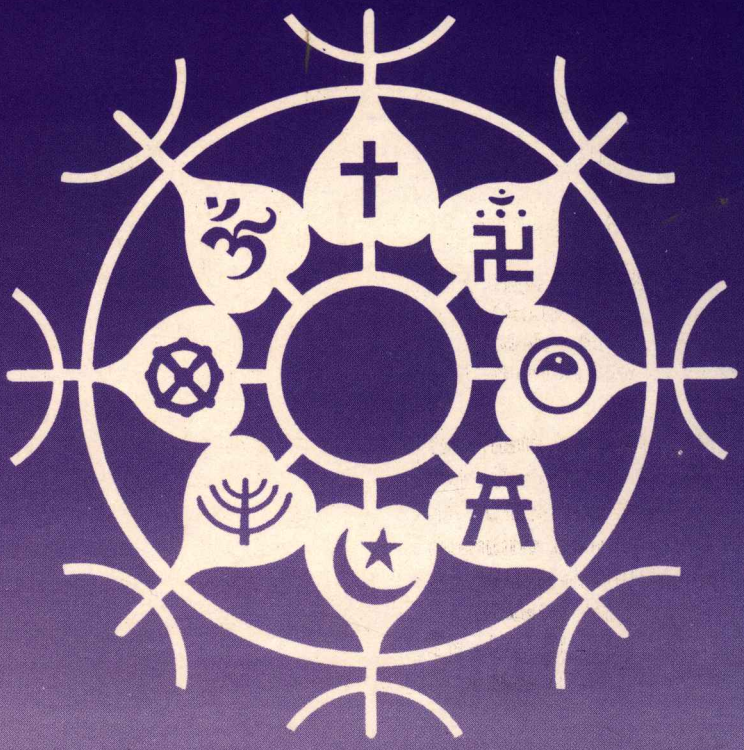

REWRITING HISTORY: A CRITIQUE

April-June 2003 Vol. XXVIII No. 2

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REWRITING HISTORY: A CRITIQUE

History and historiography, whether scientific or non-scientific, deal with the known events and personalities of the past, and the developments that have been shaping the destiny of humanity for a period of time. Although history seems to provide an explanation of various events in terms of a cause-effect relationship, that, too, with an apparent sense of objectivity, what was (and is) being handed down to us as history is not completely objective. Of course, history, as a branch of knowledge, is not merely a chronological listing of all events from the past.

History necessarily involves an interpretation, which is certainly influenced by the existential situations and needs of the persons who are instrumental in recording those events. This introduces a limitation on the value of history or historiography as an objective science. However, by a persistent effort on the part of historians they will be able to overcome this limitation by being critical as well as objective, i.e., without in any way manipulating the central historical *datum*. As every *datum* has to pass through different persons and generations, it is unavoidable that a series of interpretation take place at different places and periods, as a result of which the original event gets distanced (and, sometimes, distorted!) from the persons who approach it today. Such a situation, therefore, calls for minimizing the distance between the historical *datum* and the historian (e.g., a historical document and the present historian as an interpreter) by acquiring knowledge of the style, language, existential situation, etc., of the extant historical text or source (all these being identified as textual criticism). This, too, has its own limitation, as our ability to go back to the historical times and historical existential situations is very much limited; so also every historian – as an interpreter – necessarily attempts to interpret the events from his or her (natural or assumed) perspective. Although subjectivity will remain a constituent in any historical narration, introducing and maintaining an element of neutrality and objectivity in recording and interpreting various events from the past will certainly be foundational to the veracity of history and historiography.

Private perspectives (at the conscious and conspicuous exclusion of certain vital factual elements that pertain to the common interest, or an inclusion of *only* that which is interesting and important to serve a vested interest) and hidden agendas in the writing or rewriting of history certainly overlooks and scrupulously avoids an element of neutrality and objectivity that is a basic requirement in history or historiography. Although such an approach would be a welcome one to those who are affiliated to the same (or similar) causes, it challenges the truthfulness of history. The clause that history necessarily involves an interpretation does not mean that the historian is permitted to spitefully manoeuvre or manipulate the factuality of the historical events and persons. Any attempt from such a malignant perspective only distorts history; any historian of the sort ceases to be an instrument of bridging various generations of humanity in handing down the lore of human affairs and achievements, as history is an exclusive perspective and domain of human beings. Thus, when a historian acts out of certain vested interests and vitiates the factuality of historical events, he or she turns out to be a traitor, because he or she betrays the whole humanity to serve his or her own clandestine interests and hidden agendas, but at the cost of factuality which is the right of everyone.

Given the possibilities of history being understood as an interpretation of the past events by the historian, and the natural consequence of having a plurality of interpretations as so many are the historians' perspectives, a continuous rewriting of history is a must. This should certainly be preceded by an incessant and thorough critiquing of the past historical documents, in order to separate the historically factual nucleus from its interpretation(s) offered by different individual or corporate historians. History being an attempt to view and review the events that have been taking place over a period of time, the perspective of the historian is definitely vital and important. In fact, it is the existential needs and situations of any and every historian that sets the focus. Although, strictly speaking, history is not (and cannot be) an impersonal and abstract look at the persons and events of the past in order to articulate 'truth' in its *true* colours and in its totality, the historian must bear in mind that he or she cannot certainly *undo* those personalities who really existed and the events that took place at one time or the other in the past.

Moreover, it is equally impossible to adamantly insist on a single reading of history, as the perspectives differ from historian to historian,

from society to society, or from time to time. The inbuilt limitation of any history, which is obvious from our analysis, calls for the rewriting of history from different perspectives, so that more and more dimensions of any single event can be brought to the notice of everyone. History cannot be understood from any single source or by the attempt of a single individual, but requires a continuous, and an impassionate and objective analysis of many historical sources, made available to us through the interpretative eyes of the historians of the past and present.

These are some of the concerns that prompted the *Journal of Dharma* to address the issues related to the rewriting of history from a critical perspective. All contributors in this number have tried to articulate the issue of rewriting history from their cherished and specific perspectives, but certainly without losing sight of the holistic dimension of the whole humanity whose *history* it is, and thus contributing their might in understanding our past from a critical and creative perspective. A. Mathias Mundadan, in his article "Rewriting History: Orientations," tries to set the tone of the critiquing that is needed in our present attempts to rewrite history. Of course, he being a veteran Church historian, Mundadan evolves the fundamental principles from the context of the history of Indian Church, and holds that historians "are called upon to take a more critical and corrective approach in their utilization of the dominant Hindu religious resources, especially in the face of the traditional discrimination and social segregation of some one hundred and fifty million oppressed people (the *dalits*) of India. The authenticity of future Christian histories of India will depend upon how comprehensive (not selective) their approach is, since India is a mosaic of religions and traditions, a wide variety of languages, cultures, and ethnic groups that few countries in the world have." Joseph Pathrapankal, an established Indian biblical theologian from Dharmaram, unveils the emerging Christian perspectives in our understanding of history. From the angle of a critical and creative analysis of the biblical and historical foundations of Christianity, he highlights the need for the Church as a whole, and every Christian in particular, to be open to the Spirit active in the historical processes of humanity. He contents that "there is only one history and in it the sacred and the secular, the religious and political, the spiritual and material have their respective roles to play."

Given the place accorded to the needs and perspectives of a historian in narrating events from the past, it is to be admitted that a change of our gaze, or a shift in the perspective, would naturally lead, at least, towards a new reading and a novel narration of the events, most of the time leading to alternate conclusions. The subaltern movements' attempts to rewrite history from their perspective is a corrective to most of the extant histories and historiographies prepared from the viewpoint of the dominant groups. Against this background, George Oomen and Ambrose Pinto make a clarion call to understand and accept the necessity of rewriting the history of Indian society – both secular as well as ecclesiastical – to remedy an insufficient and deviant turn historical recordings have taken in the past. While Pinto contents that "... it is the masses that make history," approaching historiography from an objective perspective, Oomen holds that "Our objectivity should come out of our ability to establish the image of self or the subjectivity of a person or a movement under investigation. Still one can only strive to be as objective as possible and subjectivities at various levels will remain as a reality in all discourses." V. S. Elizabeth, a jurist by training and profession, and a feminist thinker, pointedly argues for the need of the hour to rewrite history from the perspectives of women – whether we call it a feminist movement or not – so that historical records would become more authentic and holistic, and we would set the stage for the future generations of women to realize the identity and uniqueness of their historical counterparts from the past. For, she holds: "If we want a future in which women and men will be equals despite their differing roles and functions, if we want a future where every individual will be valued for whatever he/she contributes to society without some kind of functions being prioritised over others, then it is important that we take control of the history that is being written."

Identifying a trilemma in Indian state's "claims to be a secular state, although it is regarded as anything but both by the minorities [non-Hindus] and the majority [Hindus] community," Arvind Sharma exhorts all Hindus to consciously initiate a historical process of forward movement through which the Hindus should strive after "the creation of a single all-India body which could credibly speak for all Hindus, or, at least, a majority of them." Sharma's call is to initiate a re-reading of the whole history of India from the perspective of a united Hindu consciousness, although it

may be challenged whether such a consciousness has ever existed at all, or is a latest invention of the new *avataras* of Hindu renaissance.

In an attempt to understand the dynamics of history and historiography, Ignatius Jesudasan reflects upon the role myth and faith play in the historical evolution of Christianity, or any religion for that matter. He tries to distinguish myth and historiography from a dynamic-static polarity-perspective and holds that "Myth, by itself, is an emotive psychic record corresponding, volatile and variable with the changing external situation, while historiography is, by and large, an externally objective and verifiable fixed record of a stable state attained by a person, group, practice or institution at any given time."

The multi-dimensional approach that all these authors have adopted in articulating their hopes and concerns for the future of history and historiography in itself is vital in maintaining truthful and responsible attitudes towards the past, the present and the future of humanity as a whole. Hereby, therefore, we make an impassionate call to all historians not to *invent* or *artificially create* events, although such things have already taken place in the historical past. Historians are also called to bear in mind that they are not entitled to *doctor* any event or personality to serve their *private* purposes. They have to codify and interpret the events from the past not from a single perspective alone, but from a variety of perspectives, which alone can lead us towards a truthful understanding of the past. Although history and historiography require the admission of different perspectives in unveiling the (multi-faceted) true nature of the past, it does not in any way mean that any one can manipulate the historical nucleus, event or personality. History, from a holistic perspective, is not (and cannot be) the private domain of any individual person or organization; it is the common patrimony of the whole humanity. Although we live in a world of privatisation that is being globalized, purportedly to serve the interests of all, let us not lose sight of the communitarian dimension of history, that makes it the history of all of us, instilling meaning and purpose in human life as a whole.

Saju Chackalackal
Chief Editor, JD

Journal of Dharma 28, 2 (April-June 2003), 150-174

REWRITING HISTORY: ORIENTATIONS

A. Mathias Mundadan♦

Rewriting history is a continuous process. There are many reasons for this. These reasons may be reduced to what one may call change in context. New methodological or ideological insights or changes in worldview of peoples may necessitate rewriting. A new analytical framework drawn upon hitherto unknown facts can be another reason.

As far as Christian history is concerned some writers point out the following developments as reasons for rewriting it. There is a significant change in the profile of the world Christian community. In 1800, 87 percent of all Christians were located in Europe. Europe was considered the Christian 'heartland'. By the beginning of the third millennium the impact of a historical shift is clear. 60 percent of all Christians live outside the traditional Western heartland. The traditional interpretive framework is completely inadequate to describe and interpret the pluriform Christian reality, as it exists today. Eurocentrism has given way to polycentrism. Another source of church growth is the biological element. In proportion to the growth of world population Christian population also grew, that too much more in Africa and Asia and other "third world" countries. Previously it was the missionaries who were the main, if not exclusive, agents in this process. But the dynamism and the role of indigenous agency are increasingly recognized.

The socio-political environment is another element in the process. Whether measured in terms of the growth of population since 1800 – from approximately 900 million to more than six billion two centuries later – or of political and social change in this period, the environment has been marked by great dynamism. This is the period of the rise of the modern city, industrialization, technological revolution and transformed transportation and communications systems. The consequent rise of the

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♦**Mathias Mundadan,** a well-known historian of Christianity in India, is the founder-director of *Jeevas*, Aluva, Kerala. His numerous publications include *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I. published by CHAI.

proletariat or the downtrodden and the marginalized nations and peoples is an added factor. All this have brought about a change in the role of religion and a crisis of Christian identity.

1. Context Analysis

The context at present – the general consciousness that seems to be prevailing – may be viewed at several levels: the world context as a whole and the trends in general historiography; the universal Christian context and trends in the Christian historiography and theology; the Indian context both general and Christian and shaping of Indian history and Indian Christian history.

2. The World Context

Some of the features of the present world context that, I believe, are outstanding will be highlighted now.

One of the most important happenings of the second half of the twentieth century was that of "de-colonization," understood as the emancipation of peoples who were subjected to colonial powers. This process is almost complete. Many independent nations have emerged with a new awakening of their cultural identity, a new self-consciousness. However, there exists a lingering concern about the phenomenon of "economic and technical colonialism," a "new imperialism." Even the word 'globalisation' is used in this context. The "Third World" theologians understand this term to mean "a phenomenon bound up with the growth and expansion of capitalism and the integration of national economies into its system." Globalisation has grown, they think, from a mercantile slave-trading age and passed through an industrial colonial stage into a corporate new-imperialist stage that has resulted in an unequal development and division of labour, "centre-periphery" dependency, a one-way flow of world wealth. "By engineering competitiveness, which is its dominant ideology, it creates polarization and leads to truncated markets." It is based on monopolies sustained by dominant nations (the 'centre'). The "Third World" (the 'periphery') understood as ex-colonies, are made to suffer. Such globalisation undermines identity and effects

exclusion and marginalization of peoples and regions, and 'feminisation' of poverty.[1]

Some radical thinkers have criticized the socio-political situation ensuing from the collapse of the Soviet Union with an unparalleled sharpness. They see a re-colonizing attempt by the West after this collapse. Roger Garaudy calls it "the monotheism of market," while for Sebastian Kappen it is "the monotheism of the capital." The latter says that the old adage "No salvation outside the church" has given way to "No salvation outside the market."

> To propagate this message, the centres of capitalism are sending out missionaries by the thousands to the less industrialized countries of Asia and Africa that are not yet fully integrated into the 'saving' sphere of the market. The whole venture has been aptly called 're-colonization'.
>
> The neo-colonialists believe that their success is guaranteed because they have an ultimate secular sanction in the nuclear weapons they have accumulated. For the so-called developing nations the only option is between consumerism utopia or nuclear devastation.[2]

Kappen feels that a "still greater guarantor of re-colonization is the Christian Ungod, distinct from the Divine whom Jesus met." This situation, whether it is dismal or not, is a great challenge for Christian history. It is in this context many see the relevance of Marxist analysis in writing history.

3. A New Epoch?

A second phenomenon is what a number of thinkers call the emergence of a "new epoch." Jean Leclerque claims that between the end of World War II and the sixties a mutation occurred on a global basis, ushering in a new stage in the forward movement of the historical process. This was brought about by the development of atomic energy, increased communications,

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[1]EATWOT, The "Final Statement of the Fourth General Assembly of EATWOT," 247. See also Dussel, "Towards a History of the Church in the World Periphery."

[2]Kappen, *Spirituality in the New Age of Rocolonization*, 2.

and the many forces at work through centuries that led to the convergence of cultures. It has resulted in the encounter of world religions and the convergence of the great traditions of spirituality (one may perhaps add secular ideologies). Leclerque's notion could be usefully compared with Teilhard's concept of "planetisation" and the radical change which the latter claims has occurred over the last century, shifting the forces from divergence to convergence in the sphere of the human community.[3] The main thrust of this theory is that a new awakening has happened, a movement towards intercultural, inter-religious, inter-ideology relations in the world, a mutual positive encounter, and a more positive universal vision. To this may be added what some eco-friendly thinkers postulate. They speak of the end of the "Cenozoic" age (sixty-five million years ago to the present, marked by the rapid evolution of mammals, birds, grasses, shrubs, and high flowering plants) and the beginning of the "ecozoic" age. A spirituality of "exodus," according to these thinkers, is the need of the day.[4] Both of these phenomena, the "new epoch" and the "ecozoic" age, deserve the serious attention of Christian historians.

4. Modern Historiography

Historical critics observe an expansion and fragmentation of the universe of history: the field of history has expanded and each category has splintered into newer and newer branches. Hence, a need is felt for orientation and for something of a possible synthesis, although the task is a difficult one. We hear about the "new history" (*La nouvelle histoire*), which had its origin in France ("made in France," like *la nouvelle vogue and le nouveau roman*, not to mention *la nouvelle cuisine*!). Started perhaps very early, its latest expression may be found in the *Annales* School founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. Fernand Braudel carried its scope to the present dimensions. It claims to deal with new problems, new approaches, new objects and aims at a "total history" (*histoire totale*).

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[3]Cousins, "Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future," 142.

[4]See Berry, in Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards, *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*.

Peter Burke enumerates several points of contrast between the old/traditional or the nineteenth century 'Rankean' model and the 'new' models. While the former is concerned with politics, the latter are concerned virtually with every human activity, the philosophical foundation of which is that reality is culturally or socially constituted. Traditional history is essentially a narrative of events, but the new history focuses on the analysis of structures. If the old history is a view "from above" (great deeds of great men, and so on), the new is "history from below" (concerned with views of ordinary people and with their experience of social change). History from below points to the limitation of 'Rankean' 'documented' history and uses a greater variety of evidence, a greater variety of human activities (visual, oral, statistical, and so on). The old history's concern for historical explanation is criticized by the new historians because the former fails to answer the variety of questions of historians which are often concerned with collective movements as well as individual actions, with trends as well as events. The new historians consider the old school's regard for objective history as an unrealistic ideal because particular points of view, cultural relativism, the network of conventions, schemata, and stereotypes, vary from culture to culture. Both old and generally new historians are professionals. However, the concern of the latter for the whole range of human activity leads them to be interdisciplinary: they insist on learning from and collaborating with social anthropologists, economists, literary critics, psychologists, sociologists, and so on.

According to Burke, de-colonization and feminism are two movements, which have obviously had a great impact on recent historical writing. In the future, the ecological movement is likely to have an increasing influence on history as in theology and ideology. A wide notion of culture (not merely high art, literature, music, and so on) is central to the new approach to history. However, there are a number of problems that were posed in connection with the ideals of the new history: the meaning of "popular culture," of "everyday life" (*la vie quotidienne, Alltagsgeschichte*), the nature of sources, of methods, of explanation, and so on. Burke asks whether the two approaches coexist and how to coordinate the expansion and fragmentation. He proposes a solution "summed up into two opposite points, complementary rather than contradictory." Proliferation of sub-disciplines is virtually inevitable. It has

many advantages: it adds to human knowledge and encourages more rigorous methods and more professional standards. At the same time, there are also some disadvantages as is evident from the problems enumerated above. Communication between disciplines or sub-disciplines is one way of keeping the disadvantages at a minimum. There are encouraging signs of rapprochement, if not of synthesis.

In the spurt of newfound enthusiasm for the "new history," independence from or even opposition to the old became very strong. "Micro-history" and the history of "everyday life" were reactions against the study of grand social trends, a society without a human face. Now reaction against this reaction is slowly emerging. Historians of popular culture are open to the changing relations between the high and the low, to the interaction of popular culture and the culture of the educated people.[5] The history of women now shows concern for gender relations in general and the historical construction of masculinity as well as femininity (for example, "Why Gender and History?" in *Gender and History*, 1989). Opposition between events and structures is being replaced by interrelationship; and a few historians are experimenting with narrative forms of analysis and analytical forms of narratives. Most important of all is the fact that the long-standing opposition between political and non-political historians is finally dissolving. G. M. Trevelyan's notorious definition of social history as "history with the politics left out" is now rejected. Concern for social elements in politics and political elements in society is on the increase. Political histories no longer confine themselves to high politics, to leaders, to the elite, but are prepared to discuss sociology of elections and "the republic in the village."[6] They are prepared to examine "political cultures," the assumptions about politics forming part of everyday life but differing from one period or region to another. Society and culture are now viewed as arenas for decision-making, and political histories discuss "the politics of the family" and "the politics of language."

The concept 'culture' in its wide, anthropological sense may serve as "a possible basis" for the reintegration of different approaches to history. We are still a long way from the "total history" (*histoire totale*) advocated

[5]See Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture.*
[6]Agulhon, *The Republic in the Village.*

by Braudel. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to believe that the goal could ever be attained, but a few more steps have been taken towards it.[7]

A word about a particular branch of history that some historians have called "overseas history" may be relevant here. It was once "colonial history" and in the British context, has been given a new name, "Imperial and Commonwealth history." Perhaps a more neutral term is "Third World" history (generally understood as history of Africa, Asia, and Latin America). It has its own problems especially regarding a proper definition. What exactly is the connotation of these various titles? Is it the history of the former colonies and their relation with the colonizing nations during the colonial period, or is it a more comprehensive history of these nations before and during the post-colonial era? It seems the meaning has undergone a great evolution since 1945, a definite year in the de-colonization process. It is becoming more and more comprehensive and also Africa-, Asia-, and Latin America-centred rather than Europe-centred. For the evolution of these overseas or "Third World" histories, the influence of the *Annales* School is significant. Hank Wesseling considers the unique phenomenon of the development of an African, Asian, or Latin American history to be natural and necessary although their connection with Europe since 1500 poses a problem. The rise of the "American empire" has produced some rethinking. He derives a few conclusions: The distinctiveness between the autonomous history of Asia and Africa and the history of European expansion needs to be kept. African and Asian histories have proved their right for existence, just like European and American histories; for the last five centuries or so the history of various parts have been interconnected and various civilizations have influenced one another.

Wesseling identifies two approaches or two ways of dealing with the problem of world history – one labelled as "historical micro-sociology" and the other more traditional. The former is a social science approach, and its aim is to learn more about social process in general. The latter is more interested in the difference between various developments and the uniqueness of certain events than in their similarities. Both approaches are characterized by a strong desire to transcend traditional boundaries, particular views, and nationalist bias. The goal of both, according to

[7]Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writings.*

Wesseling, is to make the specific Western discipline of history applicable to world history.[8]

5. The Indian Context

As a result of Anti-colonial struggles and the concomitant new awakening of cultural identity, a new national consciousness is particularly strong in India from the second part of the nineteenth century onwards and was growing throughout the twentieth century. This is a very positive process, by which the growth of a communal element can obviously be affected. The re-emergence of the age-old philosophical wisdom of India, comparable or even superior to the ancient wisdom of the Greeks, so also the deep spiritual experience of the Indian people, with its popular, religious, contemplative and religious-philosophical expression would have opened the vision of a new social and political era marked by the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan and others. But it was to some extent marred by the trauma of the division of India and the consequent rise of communal feelings. The worst part of it is the politicisation of these feelings. . Each community has its identity consciousness, which is a good thing. But that should not affect the communal harmony. The large majority of Indians are still dedicated to the ideal of harmony and peace. But our recent experience is that a minority seems to be bent on exploiting the particular identities for political purpose. Such persons can be found in all communities. But the RSS ideology and action plan are most tangible and become increasingly aggressive.

Reaction to this fundamentalist Hindu approach has given spurt to fundamentalist attitudes among the minority communities. Some of the recent events point to this fact. Terrorism seems to be part of it. Not only cross-boarder terrorism – both communally and socially motivated (rising from social and economic discrimination and oppression, e.g., the Naxalite movement) is today a regular phenomenon in India. This is another aspect of the Indian context, which necessitates a changed approach to history.

6. Indian Historiography

Anyone trying to understand Indian approach to history is struck by a

[8]Wesseling, "Overseas History," 67-92.

marked lack of historical awareness in this country until comparatively recent times. B. G. Gokhale, after examining critically the ancient and classical Indian literature, remarks: "The conclusion is inescapable that ancient India did not develop a historical tradition or a historical awareness in the same way as the Greeks and the Romans, the Chinese and the Arabs."[9] If this is the case of ancient India and, to large extent, medieval India, modern thinkers show great interest in history. This interest might have arisen as a result of a political and social need. In the closing decades of the eighteenth century a systematic rediscovery of India's past began under the impetus given by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. By the opening decades of the present century Indian and Western historians had written the long history of India on a modern scientific basis. Along with Western techniques of historical interpretation, Western ideas on the nature, content and purpose of history had also been assimilated. With the independence movement in India came a new interest in and orientation to her own history. Modern Indian historians are making their own contributions to the shaping of a view of history.

Much of the eighteenth to early nineteenth century – i.e., colonial times – history was based on a communal interpretation of history. K. N. Panikkar observes:

> The communal interpretation of history has a fairly long tradition, at least going back to the colonial times. The history of the subjected that the colonial administrators and ideologues wrote, either as a part of their intellectual curiosity or as a political mission, essentially took a religious view of the past. Although James Mill's periodization of Indian history into Hindu and Muslim periods is generally pointed out as an example of this colonial view, almost every aspect of the social, cultural and political life was incorporated into this religious schema. This view has had an abiding influence on Indian historiography, with a large number of Indian historians of vastly different ideological persuasions rather uncritically internalising this interpretation. Thus the history of India is seen through a series of stereotypes rooted in religious identity. No aspect of society or polity has escaped this religious view, be it social tensions, political battles

[9]Gokhale, *Indian Thought through the Ages: A Study of Some Dominant Concepts*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1961, 7.

> or cultural differences. Such an interpretation of history has been a part of the textbooks, both of school and college, for a long time, moulding the historical consciousness of society and in turn the social perspectives and behaviour of several generations. This divisive notion of history was one of the several ideological weapons that colonialism invoked to construct its legitimacy.[10]

This colonial interpretation of history has an entirely different import than the emerging Hindutva approach to history, although the latter shares much of the colonial assumptions. The colonial history mainly emphasises social divisions. Despite invoking the tyranny of the Yavanas and the Muslims its focus is more on social antagonism and political hostility. This aspect differentiates the Hindutva communal from the colonial communal.

> The antagonism and hostility encoded in the interpretative structure of the former, which identifies the 'outsider' as enemy, turn history into an ideology of communalism. The politics of *Ramjanmabhoomi* temple is a good example of the mediation of such history in the making of popular historical consciousness. The organising principle of this politics was not only the privileging of faith over reason, but also the identification of an enemy who acted against the religious interests of the Hindus.[11]

This Hindutva approach is also different from the revivalism, which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. Bankin Chandra Chatterji, Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda are generally considered the early protagonists of this revivalist tendency. Their attempt was to reawaken the Hindu community to the many ideas and institutions from the ancient past. It was an attempt to bring about internal revitalisation and consolidation in the context of colonial domination. Their perspective was communitarian not communal. Antagonism against other religions and communities was not a part of their perspective. Even when they were critical of other religions as in the case of Dayananda, their attempt was to explore religious truth through a comparative understanding of different religions. It did not discriminate the 'other' or

[10]Panikkar, "Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India," 74.
[11]Panikkar, "Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India," 75.

the 'outsider' (the Muslims, Christians, and Parsis) as the Hindutva historians do today.[12]

The colonial communal model of history writing continued into the twentieth century. However, the nationalist approach to history grew in pace with the momentum of the national movement and struggle for independence. At the same time such religious-philosophical thinkers like Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan who started a process of reinterpreting certain fundamental concepts of Hindu faith worked out a philosophy of action and encouraged historical activity in the sense of writing books on Indian history. The historical outlook, which emerged as a consequence, went in three directions: at one end, there is the attempt at a spiritual interpretation of the Indian historical experience and, at the other, an attempt at a Marxist or materialistic interpretation. Between these two extreme tendencies there is another group of historians who do not care for a spiritual or material interpretation of history but a more secular and scientific interpretation. They may use both the spiritual and material interpretations as phenomena to be taken into account for effecting an objective history.

Since 1945, significant advances were made in the general historiography in India. The field expanded significantly, both in quantity and quality. A number of scientific and professional periodicals came into existence, which opened up studies on various aspects of Indian history. Also, the field got enormously diversified: a variety of subject matter, the kinds of research questions, and the kinds of sources and techniques used are many and varied. A great novelty was the recognition of history as a social science, the use of social science theory for formulating research questions, and the use of social science techniques for analysing sources.

Indian historians are convinced that change is the "undeniable law of life, and history is a pursuit that attempts to grasp the course of change." Much change has come over the last thirty or fifty years and has transformed Indian historiography beyond recognition. It has achieved a share of success in effecting a paradigm shift in the analysis and interpretation. A qualitative change started with the onset of nationalism. There is a concentration on social history, necessitated as it is by the

[12]Panikkar, "Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India," 75f.

recognition that society in present-day India carries divisions, classes, and class or caste conflicts. Need is felt for writing history from the Marxist point of view just as from any other point of view. The nineteenth century approach to history is rejected; the historians have shifted their interests from personalities to social and economic trends.

Despite the advance made by post-colonial Indian historiography, the need to explore new areas and refine existing methodologies remains. No other theme in modern Indian historiography evoked so much interest, even passion, as the complex manner in which Indians became conscious of their nationhood and organized themselves to oppose and overthrow colonial rule. In the historiography of nationalism itself, different strands have emerged. The relationship between colonialism and nationalism is fundamental. There are two different ideological approaches to the problem of this relationship: the liberal view that colonialism and nationalism are complementary and the critical view which divorces the two. The Marxists relate the internal class struggles and the anti-colonial movement. The major weakness of this approach is the relative neglect of caste and culture. Culture transcended such limits to create the worldview of people. This was a terrain in which modernity articulated and negotiated, and the cultural common sense of people was reformulated. Marxists fail to give adequate response to this fact. The recent renewal of the cognisance of the cultural context of nationalism and the significance of cultural struggles in the making of national consciousness is particularly important in the context of a culturalist interpretation of nationalism advanced by Hindu communalists and post-modern radicals.

The subaltern group has come forward to write history from below. The approach is welcome, but some historians have felt that to create a 'new' world by completely negating the old is prone to produce a myopic view. And some of the essays of the subaltern historians, they fear, can even help to bring a comeback of colonial and communal histories through the 'radical' backdoor.

New trends in Indian historiography gradually discard the periodization into Hindu, Muslim, British, or the equivalent Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. Accordingly, the line of demarcation has to be made on the basis of fundamental social changes, which do not necessarily coincide with invasions, conquests, and dynastic changes. Regional history

sometimes tends toward regional chauvinism. If this is avoided and if placed in perspective, regional history can usefully modulate the generalization about historical change on a national level and will demonstrate that there is a multiplicity of histories, even of early India, which have to be co-related. When there are various perspectives on the same event, the historian has to be aware of this variance, both in looking for evidence and in interpreting it. The greater the contention, the more there will be a honing of generalizations. The survival of history as a discipline depends as much on theoretical rigor as on historical data.

Some Pakistani historians see the history of "Muslims in India" as a struggle for a separate national right from. 712 A. D, when Mohammad Ibn Qasim entered Sind. Against this, some Indian historians characterize the entire period from circa 1200 onwards to be one of foreign rule. The mainstream historians, however, have a much broader and critical view. They show a greater readiness to study the factors of change and stagnation and to identify various internal economic, social, and ideological contradictions. Historians are making a new assessment of Medieval India and there is a growing criticism of nationalist and Marxist historiography of pre-colonial India. There are definite signs of the tendency that the given histories are not taken in trust.[13]

7. Indian Christian Context and Historiography

Before the fifteenth century there was only one Christian community in India, that of the St. Thomas Christians. Their historical consciousness can be assessed from their oral traditions, customs and practices. A few songs and stories prevalent among them even before the sixteenth century witness to their consciousness. Many Portuguese and later Western records provide us with details. The salient features of their historical consciousness are the following: Theirs was an Indian Church founded by the Apostle Thomas at the very beginning of the Christian era. They had lived the same social-cultural life as their Hindu brethren. They lived in a very cordial relationship with the latter and respected their faith and religious praxis. Their Church, founded by one of the apostles, was an individual Church, which had established an early relation with the East-Syrian Church, and because of that connection had received certain

[13]See Habib, et al., "Independence Jubilee Special," 55-63.

elements of the East-Syrian tradition of worship and church order. They were part of the universal Church of Christ and evinced solidarity with all Christians from wherever they came (from the sixteenth century onwards, mainly from the West). They respected the different customs and usage of the foreign Christians and expected the latter to respect those of the Indian Christians, the St. Thomas Christians. These features made up their identity and selfhood. They would resist any encroachment upon this identity and selfhood. Their turbulent history from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth and to some extent up to the present is the story of their protest against attempts at such encroachments on the part of foreigners: Western missionaries as well as Syrian Churches.[14]

From the sixteenth century onwards we have partial or more comprehensive histories of Christianity in India written by Western authors. Gouvea's *Jornada*, composed at the turn of the seventeenth century and published together with the acts and decrees of the so-called Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur), and an account by Francis Ros, SJ written about 1604 are perhaps the earliest systematic 'histories' of the ancient period of Christianity in India. While Gouvea the Augustinian gloated over the "good work" carried out by his confrere Archbishop Meneses among the St. Thomas Christians, Ros, the Jesuit, highlighted the "success story" of the Jesuits. Two general mission histories were composed after this: one by the Franciscan Paulo Trindade, written in the beginning of the seventeenth century (1962-67) and the other by the Jesuit Francisco de Souza, written at the turn of the eighteenth century and published in 1710. Trindade's is a story of double triumph: the glorious achievements of the Franciscans in the East and the conquest (*Conquista Espiritual*) of the religion and territories of the people of the East by Christians of the West. De Souza's history is also one of triumph and conquest (*Oriente Conquistado*, "The East won over to Christ by the Jesuits"), although it is less partial and more sober.

At the end of the seventeenth century, Michael Geddes wrote his *History of the Church of Malabar*, based, on *Jornada* of Gouvea. In it there is a faithful English translation of the decrees of the "Synod of Diamper." He was writing at a time when no Protestant mission had been started, and yet he was very apologetic and came out strongly against the

[14]Mundadan, *Sixteenth Century Tradition of St. Thomas Christians.*

"Popists," the Catholic missionaries who, he alleged, tormented the St. Thomas Christians whose doctrinal tenets were, in his opinion, more in agreement with the Anglican tenets than the "Popish" or Roman tenets. In the eighteenth century, two histories appeared, one by La Croze (Protestant, 1724) and the other by Paulinus (Catholic, 1794). The stories of the first Indian bishop of the Latin rite, Matteo de Castro Mahalo (seventeenth century), and Padre Caetano Vittorino de Faria eighteenth century,[15] both nationalists who rebelled against the Portuguese Padroado system and worked for the indigenisation of the Indian hierarchy, are recorded in various Portuguese sources. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, an exceptional book was written in incisive Malayalam, in the form of a travelogue, but with penetrative anti-missionary historical reflections, evincing strong national sentiments, by a St. Thomas Christian priest from Kerala, Cathenar Thomas Paremmakkal (1971). As it contained sharp and poignant attacks on the Carmelite missionaries who were at the helm of affairs over the Catholic St. Thomas Christians at that time, they even forbade its reading by the people.

Histories of Protestant writers like Hough, John Kaye, Sherring, Richter carry on the anti-Catholic apologetics that Geddes had started at the end of the seventeenth century. In the twentieth century, there was change in various respects. Especially, we note a change in perspective. Webster cites the examples of histories of Rajaiah D. Paul (1952) and P. Thomas (1954). While the emphasis of the former is on the history of the Indian Church, that of the latter is on the history of the Christian community. In the same century, there were four or five histories of the St. Thomas Christians (two by St. Thomas Christians themselves and two or three by Europeans[16]). In the former, the anti-Western emphasis and also, to some extent, the Catholic-Orthodox polemics find their place.

From the 1920s onwards a good deal of the original sources, especially of the Portuguese origin, whether printed or otherwise, became accessible to students of Indian Christian history. At least from 1950s onwards these sources were increasingly used by researchers, especially Catholic clerics. Consequently, Indian Christian history became more and more professional. The general professionalisation of Indian Christian

[15]See Mundadan, *Indian Christians*, 154ff.

[16]Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, L. W. Brown.

history and the shift in perspective were on the increase from 1960s onwards. 'Kaj Baago's contribution in this regard is significant. Many members of the Editorial Board of the Church History Association of India (CHAI) constituted in 1973 also contributed substantially to this change of perspective. The cumulative result of these contributions led to the special perspective drawn up for the publication of the multi-volume CHAI History of Christianity in India.[17]

Good discerning historians point out four important changes that had taken place from about 1824 to the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the historians, publishers, and intended readers were all Western and mainly Protestant; in the twentieth century all of them had become Indians including Hindus and Muslims. With this, the social and intellectual context broadened. The second change in the growing professionalisation and the high expectation it placed on historians. Christian histories in India began to draw increasingly from a far greater variety of source materials and the confidence in the trustworthiness of the missionary records was shaken, since conflicting evidence was found in Hindu, Muslim or Government sources. Finally the place of change itself has changed. A rapid diversification of the community of writers and readers marked advance in professionalisation, and sharp change in perspectives introduced by advocates of indigenisation and the academic historians.[18]

From the foregoing analysis of Indian Christian historiography, it is clear why the Editorial Board of CHAI declared that the perspective, from which the history of Christianity has been written in the past, stood "in serious need of revision." The earlier histories, except what is reflected in some records about the historical consciousness of the ancient (St. Thomas) Christians of India or some histories written by them about themselves, treated the history of Christianity in India as an eastward extension of Western ecclesiastical history. Stress has been laid upon either its internal history or upon its "foreign mission" dimension so that the Church is viewed as a relatively self-contained unit, which acted upon and was acted upon by the society outside.[19]

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[17]CHAI, "Scheme for a Comprehensive History of Christianity in India," 89.
[18]Webster, "The History of Christianity in India: Aims and Method."
[19]CHAI, "Scheme for a Comprehensive History of Christianity in India," 89.

As Shenk notes, these histories swerved between two extremes: either an entirely internal and parochial viewpoint dominated or the "foreign mission" point of view. Both of these extremes reinforced the notion that Christianity was alien to Indian soil.[20] In the past, many concerned Hindu thinkers (for example, K. C. Sen) have painfully pointed this out.

What was needed was a history that located the Church firmly in the Indian historical context. It must describe Christian history as a real encounter of the Christian gospel with the soul of India, as the process of "the planting of the gospel inside" the Indian culture, the Indian philosophy, and the Indian religion.[21] Hence, the CHAI Editorial Board proposed "to write the history of Christianity in the context of Indian history" by focusing attention upon the social-cultural history of the Christian people of India, by using a framework, which is both ecumenical and national, and by using the region as their basic working unit. The four dimensions of an integral history of Christianity in India as defined in the perspective are social-cultural (the encounter dimension mentioned above), regional (a history that attends to the various diversities of India), national (the general reference being India as a whole), and ecumenical (looking at the Christianity of India as a whole).

8. The Task of Christian History Today and Tomorrow

The changing tasks that are set before Christian historians at the onset of the third millennium are to be derived from the world context and the Christian contexts that I have tried to delineate so far. Given the worldwide expansion of the Church and the consequent altered identity, the changed world, and ecclesial reality, Christian historians should ask, What new approaches and what new perspectives are demanded of history? They will ask questions like the ones posed below and visualize the procedure to be adopted for their task. The answers will decide what sources are to be used, how they are to be interpreted, what methods are to be used, and what perspectives are to be adopted.

The questions are as follows:

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[20]Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," 54.

[21]Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, 85.

1) Did the Churches recognize the awakened national consciousness of peoples and their culture and religion after the de-colonization process was complete? How have the alternatives to the sinister globalisation worked in the Churches? How are we to write the history of the new evangelisation, the present cycle of evangelisation in the 'periphery'? How are we to proceed with a Christian history of, for, and by the poor?

2) Has a new epoch emerged? If so, what are its implications for the Churches? Have the Churches taken serious note of these implications? Do they grasp the intercultural, multi-faceted, and integral dimensions of the present era? How do they react to them? Have the historians to conceive of a new periodization of Christian history?

3) What impact will the 'new' history and the attempts to integrate it with the 'old' have on Christian history? Will it help the search for a global Christian history? Has the early concept of independent local Churches and of the church as a communion of churches re-emerged in the second half of the twentieth century? How has that concept influenced Christian theology and history?

Having given these sample questions for writing Christian history in the future, I will now concentrate on the tasks of historians from a "Third Church," particularly from an Indian, point of view.

Christian history in the third millennium must recognize the religious tradition of India, all religious traditions of the world for that matter, as part of God's universal plan of salvation. It must recognize that God has revealed himself to peoples of various religious traditions and ideologies, that they have experienced the Divine and its manifestations. The Christian historians of this century will carefully examine whether a really deep encounter of the heart of Christianity with the authentic and multifaceted soul of India (as well as the soul of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the soul of the emerging new cultures of the rest of the world) has taken place. They will ask whether this encounter has changed the prevailing traditional form of Christianity and whether this encounter has changed the culture of India, of the rest of Asia, and of the world.

Christian history of the third millennium will examine how far a distinct Indian, an Asian, an African, or a Latin American Christian

theology and praxis have come of age; how far they have been recognized all over the Christian world; how far these theologies and praxes have entered into mutual dialogue; how far their influence has been felt in other parts of the world; including the West; how far they have been able to help a growing realization that no particular theology or praxis or a particular institutional structure can be *the* theology or praxis or structure for the whole Church at all times; how far these theologies and praxes have been able to shake the assumptions and foundations of traditional theologies and praxes of Western and Eastern Christendoms, and how far they have assumed the proportions of a challenge.

Christian history in the third millennium must recognize that not only the intellectual-philosophical resources but also the experiential and existential (the religious-cultural and socio-political) resources of different peoples are avenues for Christian encounter and Christian hermeneutics. Christian history in the third millennium must take seriously into consideration the attempts made by secular historians, anthropologists, and sociologists and acknowledge that these attempts enable Christian historians and Christian theologians to re-read history and highlight neglected and forgotten events.

Indian Christian historians of the future are called upon to take a more critical and corrective approach in their utilization of the dominant Hindu religious resources, especially in the face of the traditional discrimination and social segregation of some one hundred and fifty million oppressed people (the *dalits*) of India. The authenticity of future Christian histories of India will depend upon how comprehensive (not selective) their approach is, since India is a mosaic of religions and traditions, a wide variety of languages, cultures, and ethnic groups that few countries in the world have.

The future Christian historians will explore how far the Christian Church and her theology-praxis has come out of the closed circle of intellectuals and academicians and become truly the people's Church, the people's theology, the people's worship, and the people's institutions. They will ask whether an Indian approach to theology has done away with a separation between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, and whether it has become a *sadhana* (a means) for the realization of the Divine; whether doing theology has ceased to be an exercise in borrowing, and become an

exercise springing from Indian roots in language and content, an exercise carried on by Indian thinkers and teachers who have their deep roots in the Indian religious-cultural context and not in the Western or Eastern Christendom.

A historian of the third millennium will focus attention on how Christian thinkers and activists have been able to release the liberating force of the gospel, how they have been able to develop a theology and an action plan which addresses the situation of mass poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and illiteracy, which contributes to the transformation of a situation of the underprivileged and discriminated-against groups: the tribal people, the other oppressed groups, the women, the children. The future historian will ask how the people belonging to these groups are involved in a major way to take up leadership in the communities, as teachers, as pastors, as theologians, and as animators.

Indian historians will in the future examine how far the Christians have taken seriously the thoughts and lives of such Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Muslims, who are fascinated by the person and message of Jesus, who, rooted in their culture and tradition of the people and at the same time devoted and attached to Christ,[22] offer fresh insights into the Christian faith. They will examine whether a single Indian theology or praxis developed, or a plurality of theologies and praxes developed, considering the composite and culturally multifaceted India and the existence of varied groups of Christians – Latin, Oriental, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox – and the existence of a variety of religious communities, theologies, and praxes stemming from distinctly regional and ecclesiastic varieties, from the experiences of distinct groups of people like the *dalits*, women, and so on. Two or three streams or strands of theology and praxis have developed in India: the spiritual-contemplative, the intellectual-philosophical, the socio-political, or the *bhakti*, *jnana* and *karma* strands. The future historian will examine how these different streams or strands have interacted and met, and whether a paradigm has emerged to provide a synthesis.

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[22]K. C. Sen, P. C. Mozoomdar, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Subba Rao, and so on.

9. The Task for a Global Christian History

'Global' evokes mixed feelings today in the context of the use and misuse of the word 'globalisation' and the sinister connotations associated with it. Wilbert R. Shenk in his article, "Towards a Global Christian History," keeps a balanced view of the global, as he stresses equality and parity. He proposes a model for the development of an approach of parity, an intercultural approach to history to realize the goal of a global church history. He also provides a model for the same, based on the insights of Paul A. Cohen, who investigated how the history of China has been written over the past 150 years. Giving importance to the regional and denominational, even to the Indian identity should not mean 'parochialising'. In India, perhaps in all the previously colonial countries, anti-colonialism and anti-western sentiments, when exaggerated, turn out to be a sort of parochialism. The recent reactions in certain circles in India against some programme conceived in connection with the anniversary of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India smacks of such parochialism (the attitude of "we have nothing to do with Gama; we have nothing to do with the West"). So too the *dalit* (the oppressed classes) oriented history, "history from below," sometimes tends to be prejudicial against the high-caste culture. (Even the mention of "brahman-sanskritic" culture is anathema to some *dalit* enthusiasts.) Such histories can be hijacked, as Romila Thapar says, for purposes of regional (or national) chauvinism. Otherwise, these historians have a message, the message contained in the cluster of insights provided by the studies of Leenhardt ("acculturation in two directions"), of Fairbank ("cultural stimulus and responsibility in both directions"), and the special meaning 'translation' gets in the particular context of mission. These insights are of prime importance in our movement towards a global church history which, according to Shenk, must have the following marks: recognition that "our history" is not only our regional or national history, but part of the world church history; recognition that the local is essential, because there can be no global apart from the local; recognition of the power of narrative and social history; and finally, recognition of the meaning of the Church as "its capacity to incarnate the life of God revealed in Jesus Christ among all peoples, in all places, and in all times." The People of God can no longer afford to live in the era of the 'Western'

or 'Eastern' or any other parochialism. A global church history must celebrate cultural authenticity combined with ecclesial unity.[23]

Hans Küng, referring to an ecumenical council, makes an important point. All the individual Churches so different from one another, scattered throughout the *oikumene* in all countries and continents, made up of all races, languages, and cultures, belonging to societies with different political social structures, and having different rites, liturgies, theologies, and forms of piety and laws, by virtue of their assemblage constitute and realize the visible – invisible unity of the whole Church. It is a concrete actualisation of the unity of the different, heterogeneous, independent, Churches with their own problems and difficulties, needs, concerns, and demands. That is unity, catholicity in pluralism.

In the emerging picture of historiography in general, as referred to earlier, the new and the traditional seem to be gradually converging. The new epoch is marked by convergence rather than divergence. In general, in Indian historiography, regional or local histories, if not hijacked for purposes of regional chauvinism, can usefully act as a correction to easy generalization. These insights are of great importance when we consider a global history.

EATWOT members speak of a genuine globalisation. The specificity of local churches must be taken seriously, and history should be written in such a way as to be for the development of the awareness of these churches today. From these regional positions, a new world vision of the Church and its history, a global analogy, may perhaps emerge; in other words, there emerges a vision constructed from the difference and specificities of each in the light of the similarity deriving from our common Christianity.[24]

In conclusion, I make reference to the nineteenth century Hindu genius, Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-84), not because Sen was interested in a global Christian history, but because he entertained a global vision which is inspiring for the concept of a global Christian history. Sen was one of those nineteenth century Indian Renaissance young intellectuals who had

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[23]Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," 56.

[24]Dussel, "Towards a History of the Church in the World Periphery," 12.

received a good English education and been deeply influenced by a Western secular and religious outlook, who looked to Western enlightenment and Christian religion as sources for reforming and renewing Hindu society from within; he longed for a healthy marriage between the East and the West; and he also looked forward to an era in which a genuine Indian heritage would shine forth with added lustre when illuminated by the fresh light from the West. In attempts to interpret Christianity as a fulfilment of Hinduism as well as in attempts to 'Orientalise' Christ and Christianity, this quest for the marriage between the East and the West is strongly evident. K. C. Sen who was a "Christian," short of baptism and membership in any Christian denomination, was perhaps the first Indian to perceive clearly the positive implications of bringing about a harmony between the Indian religious values and the spiritual content of the religion of Christ.[25]

Sen launched his *Navavidhan* in 1879, which he called "The Future Church." It was the Christ-centred (not Christianity–centred) harmony of all scriptures and prophets and dispensations, "the sweet music of divine instruments," "the celestial court where, around enthroned divinity shine the light of all heavenly saints and prophets." It had united the East and the West, Asiatic and European faiths and characters. He concludes his 1883 lecture on "Asia's Message to Europe" with his image of the final consummation of the Church of the New Dispensation:

> And as the new song of Atonement is sung with enthusiasm by million voices, representing all the various languages of the world, a million souls, each dressed in its national garb of piety and righteousness, glowing in an infinite and complete variety of colours, shall dance round and round the Father's throne and peace and joy shall reign forever.[26]

This passage reminds me of the task set for global church history, "to celebrate, cultural authenticity combined with ecclesial unity."

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[25]Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, 312-335.
[26]Scott, ed., *Keshub Chunder Sen*, 289.

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UNDERSTANDING HISTORY: EMERGING CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Until the dawn of the Age of Reason a dual conception of history, which had gradually been evolving since the early Middle Ages, was the universally accepted way in which Christendom regarded the past. It is implicit in the eighteenth-century phrase, *history sacred and profane.* Accordingly, the total of human historical knowledge could be divided into two quite distinct types, differing on account of the disparate sources from which they came. Sacred history was the history of the world as it was divinely and therefore without any error disclosed in the Bible. This history was complete and superior in itself not only for all its past since the creation of the world, but also for all its future until its consummation in the Last Judgment. This sacred history was also known as the salvation history, meaning thereby that it was necessary to be included in this sacred history if humans wanted to arrive at salvation in the next life. There was no choice possible. Until the final disintegration of the medieval world-view in the eighteenth century, world history, also known as profane history, had to be fitted into the periphery of this sacred history of the Bible, as it had been since the time of Orosius in the early fifth century CE.[1] This conception of sacred history, supposed to be derived from the infallible teaching of the Bible, and supplying the framework into which all other histories had to be somehow accommodated, survived among the Christians until after the close of the Age of Reason. Profane[2] history or

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[1]Augustine had commissioned his scholarly researcher, Orosius, to write a more orderly complement to his own discursive *De Civitate Dei.*

[2]The adjective 'profane' is derived from the Latin *profanes*, which literally meant "before the temple," i.e., 'non-sacred', 'unconsecrated', 'secular'.

world history, as contrasted with this sacred history or salvation history, was purely a human enterprise which had no goal and no meaning. There was, therefore, an absolute qualitative difference between sacred and profane history. Everything except the sacred history was secondary, a marginal reality. Hence, many Christian theologians held world history, as a whole, in low esteem.[3]

It is this dichotomic approach to history, as sacred and profane, that has prevailed in Christian thinking till very recent times. The history of the world, the history of other world religions, and political histories were all seen as not related to salvation history and they only served as the framework and the matrix within which the sacred history took place, and this sacred history was identified with the biblical revelation. But a real change has taken place in our times with the emergence of what we may call a process of secularisation. In fact, the world of today has become very much secular, and it would appear that the process is by no means over yet. Secular thinking is the keynote of contemporary philosophical, scientific and theological thinking. As a result, the trend in various areas of human reflection is to underline the secular dimension of human life and human history. This universal secularity challenges the faith of millions of people and they are faced with the question as to what their attitude to secularity should be. It could happen that faith would try to ignore the acuteness of the situation and simply hammer away behind locked doors at its customary practices in theology and piety, as though there had been no worthwhile issue, and, therefore, there is no need to understand and answer the challenges of the ever-changing times. A faith that is unhistorical is not likely to feel itself threatened. It can go on talking with extraordinary superiority about God and the world. But it lacks urgency and a taste of reality. Some would see this whole situation as a denial of the sacred, while others see it as the sign of an ushering in of a complementary approach in human thinking, where the natural and the supernatural, the this-worldly and the other-worldly, the sacred and the secular have their respective roles to play. It is also related to the dynamics of a theocentric and anthropocentric approach, where both the divine and the human are to be seen in complementary dimensions, enriching each other and not opposed to each other. The very approach to the Bible as the Word of God

[3]See Alan Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane*, London: SCM Press, 1964, 23-26.

in human language, which has inaugurated the scientific study of the Bible towards the end of the 19th century and during the 20th century was an affirmation of the complementary dimension of the sacred as associated with salvation and the secular or the so-called profane. Thereby a new understanding of history and a new approach to the action of God in history have also emerged.

1. Salvation History within World History

When Christian thinkers developed the concept of a linear understanding of history as the unique contribution of the Old and New Testaments within the larger framework of a cyclic and circular approach to history, there grew up a tendency to consider the history of Israel and the history of the Christian movement as an ongoing process of salvation history, starting with the creation and the call of Abraham and reaching its goal and realization in the Christ Event, from where the salvation history moves forward in the history of the Christian movement in ever-widening dimensions till it reaches its consummation in the second coming of Christ. Hence, the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis were understood as the stage of world history, while from Genesis chapter twelve onwards there is the inauguration of the salvation history with the call of Abraham which is later focused on the history of Israel. This history underwent many vicissitudes until in a unique figure of Messianic expectation the whole history of salvation was concentrated. In Jesus of Nazareth this Messianic hope of salvation was realized and from him onwards the salvation history took new dimensions, inviting people to join this mainstream of salvation. Accordingly, it was maintained that the Church, to which the work of salvation is entrusted, has to bring in as many people as possible so that they can also come out of the realm of world history and belong to the history of salvation. Here, according to many, lies the meaning of mission and evangelization as well as the whole meaning of the ministry of the Church in the world.

Thus, Cullmann made a conscious and consistent effort to see the Christ Event as constituting the middle of time through his work published in German in 1946 under the title *Christus und die Zeit* and translated into English as *Christ and Time* in 1951. He wrote: "In Christ time has reached its mid-point, and at the same time the moment has reached in which this is preached to men (and women), so that with the establishment of the

division of time, they are able to believe in it and in this faith to understand time in a Christian way, that is taking Christ as the Centre."[4] In his efforts to explain the unique characteristics of the theology of Luke, Hans Conzelmann also tried to understand the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth as the "Centre of Time," which is preceded by the history of Israel and is followed by the period since the ascension of Christ, which is the period of the Church. The German edition, *Die Mitte der Zeit,* was published in 1953 and its English translation came out in 1960 as *Theology of Luke.* Around the middle of the 20th century this approach to biblical theology and time was a standard in theological writings.[5]

Though it was a fascinating idea for all theologians to evaluate history in this manner during those years, when Western theologians were supposed to have the right to say the last word about anything theological and biblical, now theologians and exegetes in general are not all happy with this approach to the Christian understanding of history. This is not to deny the importance of the Christ Event in history nor somehow to relativize the role of Christ in salvation history taken as a whole, a fear that is being expressed again and again in the documents of the Church. More important for us is to understand God as guiding the entire historical process within which we have to see and understand the person of Christ and his redemptive mission. The salient perspectives of God's involvement in the history of Israel and of the early Church are mainly faith articulations of Israel and the early Church. We must respect their commitment to their faith, with which they responded to God's revelation. But it is not correct to make these faith expressions as applicable to all humans and also to apply this approach as a criterion for evaluating all events in the world history.

The fact that this assumption of Christian theologians was not questioned in the past is not a justification for the contemporary academic world to continue using it during these changed times in a pluralistic culture like ours. What we can say is that in this exercise of superiority complex the Christians were following a kind of Constantine syndrome,

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[4]Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History,* trans. Floyd V. Filson, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1951, 93.

[5]See Neal M. Flanagan, *Salvation History: An Introduction to Biblical Theology,* New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964.

which started in the fourth century of the Common Era and which later on was revived during the time of the Crusades, and after the 14th century through the colonialism organized from the Christian West with its military and missionary power trying to conquer the whole world. This questionable programme of the conquest of the world was based on two major assumptions: One, that Christianity is the only true religion and that all other religions are false. Again, there were specifications. Only the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church and all other Christians were separated brethren. The second assumption was that earthly life was only a preparation for the life after death. Salvation of the soul was the main agenda of Christian mission.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the most challenging theologians of the 20th century, has affirmed, our world is a world "come of age." The world has grown into maturity. As a result, some of the unhealthy assumptions and uncritical approaches to reality prevailing among Christians have been willingly given up without anybody questioning them or fighting for them. Theologians all over the world started looking at the world and history through new eyes. They have begun to see that there is only one God and one human community, and consequently there is only one history with many dimensions. Ethnic, social, cultural and political events are all part of this history that was guided by the same God. According to Gustavo Gutierrez, there are no two histories, one profane and one sacred, juxtaposed, or closely linked. Rather there is only one human history and one human destiny. The historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitively in the salvific horizon. Only thus will its true dimensions emerge and its deepest meaning be obvious. It seems, however, that contemporary theology has not yet furnished the categories, which would allow us to think through and express adequately this unified approach to history.[6]

2. Holistic Understanding of Salvation History

A new humanism is on the rise, and, accordingly, a new approach to human life is also seen as a unified whole. Moreover, salvation is understood as embracing the human life taken as a whole. An awareness of

[6]See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press, 1974, 153.

selfhood, a search for purpose in history, and a yearning for new forms of community are the characteristics of the new humanism that is gradually evolving all over the world. This phenomenon is found in all religions. Secular and religious movements are bearers of this new humanism. The ultimate goal of all this process is humanization and this is the new name for salvation in its broadest sense. Humanization means the process through which humans are rendered authentic and integrated. Humanization means the process through which humans are enabled to live in dignity as God's children. Humanization means the destruction of all structures of sin, whether social, cultural, religious or even political. Humanization affirms that life here on earth is equally meaningful and relevant as life after death. Humanization means that the whole humankind has a right to enjoy the good things of this world, and the unfortunate division of the humankind into 'haves' and 'have-nots' is unjustified, with 20% of the world population enjoying 80% of the resources of the earth and 80% of the world population constrained to live with the remaining 20% of such resources. Humanization means the eradication of all oppressive structures whether they belong to the old colonialism or the new forms of colonialism coming under the label of globalisation.

In fact, what we find in the Old and New Testaments are attempts at seeing God entering into human history understood as a whole, and engaged in accomplishing the holistic humanization of the entire humankind. The entire Bible is about a God who creates and acts, a God who is continually involved in the history of humankind. Though the first impression we get about Israel is that it was a community selected from among the nations in order to live in isolation, several writers of the Old Testament are bold enough to articulate the universal and pluralistic background of Israel and their task of being an open community. Thus, we have the Elohistic tradition introducing the call of Abraham as God's definitive step to bless all the families of the earth, insofar as Abraham represents the ideal person who commits himself to God and to his saving plans. Abraham is, therefore, more a paradigm than a particular person, more a parable than an individualized one (Gen 12:1-3). Prophet Ezekiel wrote to the Israelites: "Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite" (Ez 16:3). So also Amos spoke to Israel: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt,

and Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (Am 9:7). All what we find in the Old Testament under the guise of the election of Israel, the divine protection given to them, Israel's hatred towards the nations, and the holy wars Israel waged against the nations, are the creations of some specific theological traditions behind the Old Testament. There is a constant effort made by many other writers of the Old Testament to emphasize the universal dimensions of God's involvement in Israel's history as related to the larger history of humankind.

3. Israel Encountering God in the World History

The Bible has two detailed narratives about the creation of the world in the Priestly (Gen 1:1-2:4a) and the Yahwist (Gen 2:4b-25) traditions. In both these narratives the entire humankind is the focus of the creation, either as the climax of God's creative act insofar as men and women are created in God's image and likeness and are given the task of being the steward of the creation (Gen 1:26-31), or as the centre of a beautiful and idyllic garden where God created them and gave them a share in God's own life through the divine breath (Gen 2:7) and invited them to be creative and stewarding in the task entrusted to them (Gen 2:15). But this lofty picture of humankind is reversed through the symbolic story of the fall of the humankind (Gen 3:1-24). This is followed by several haggadic stories, the climax of which is in the story of the tower of Babel which is characterized by the presumption of humankind to safeguard its own future without any recourse to the assistance of God, an attempt that was defeated by God himself through the confusion of their language (Gen 11:1-9). The entire narrative in these chapters of Genesis has the theme of God creating the world and humankind through his goodness, while humans were not responding to this divine act of love through the misuse of their freedom. This theme is presented through various stories about the ascending power of sin and the growing separation of humankind from God, on the one hand, and the punishing, purifying and supporting hand of God, on the other.[7] Though we must respect the historical background of these stories, through his Encyclical *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII has clearly instructed the members of the Church that they should not look for the

[7]See G. von Rad, *Genesis*, London: SCM Press, 1961, 148-153.

kind of modern history in these early chapters of Genesis.[8] The mistake in the past had been in taking all these stories as if they had happened the way they are narrated. If we closely analyse these chapters, it becomes clear that the main purpose of these stories is to highlight the origin of everything from God and also to theologically establish the reason why God had recourse to a new beginning with the call of Abraham. Hence, we read about the ultimate purpose of the call of Abraham as God's plan to bless all families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3).

Although the book of Genesis begins with the story of the creation of the whole universe, thereby preparing the larger background for the history of Israel, it is the considered view of Old Testament scholars that the basic and central story of the Old Testament is the narrative of the exodus from Egypt and the many events related to this primordial event. Here we encounter a God entering into the heart of human history with a definite plan about it. Though it is the story of the God of Israel getting involved in the destiny of a particular people, the story is to be understood also as a paradigm and pattern of how God is concerned about all humans and how he wants to liberate the oppressed and the exploited wherever and whenever it happens in the course of history. Hence, the prologue to the central story of the Old Testament is God speaking to Moses from the burning bush: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Yes, I know their sufferings. And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me, and I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Ex 3: 7-10). It is this stirring historical drama that is unfolded in the book of Exodus. The protagonist is Israel's God, who intervenes on behalf of a helpless band of slaves. The plot, developed through a succession of suspense-filled episodes, is God's contest against the Egyptian Pharaoh, the mightiest emperor of the day. The denouement comes when, in the nick of time, Israel's pursuers are swallowed up in the

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[8]See J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996, 109-110.

waters of the Sea of Reeds. The leading theme of the drama is the action and triumph of God over human malice.

From the Egyptian point of view, the exodus was just a marginal political event: the liberation of a band of slaves from the yoke of Pharaoh with no political consequence. That was all its public meaning. In that sense it can be viewed and compared with similar political events in the lives of other peoples. But to Israel the exodus was an event with a divine purpose and plan. What happened to them was God's redemption of his people, not just their liberation from political servitude. The exodus was an act of God and it was a sign of his loving presence in the midst of the people. Therefore, the story of the exodus deals with history on a different plane on which much of our history is usually written and studied today. No external historical study can demonstrate that the exodus was an act of God; it was politically an insignificant event. But to Israel this political event was the medium through which God's presence among the Israelites and his purpose about them were disclosed. God's revelation to Israel did not come like a bolt from the blue; it came through the crises of a divine dimension of meaning. The general public was unaware of the whole thing. For Israel, it was full of meaning, both for them and for their future. For the Hebrew writers, to write history was to narrate these mighty acts of God.

In this context it is very useful to reflect on the very revelation of the divine name 'Yahweh' made to Moses on mount Sinai, through which God wanted to identify himself as different from all other gods. In Hebraic thought it was believed that any name is filled with a mysterious power and significance, for the name represents the innermost identity of a person. In the exodus story we come to one of the most cryptic passages in the Old Testament. When Moses asked God for his name, he answered Moses: "I am who I am" or "I will be what I will be" (Ex 3:14). He further said: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'." In Ex 3:15 God continues: "YHWH, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever; and this is my title for all generations." YHWH,[9]

[9]In the Old Testament period Hebrew language was written only with consonants; vowels were not added until the early Christian era, when Hebrew was no longer a living language. It is now accepted that the original pronunciation of the

technically known as the tetragrammaton, is most probably the third person rendering of the first person YHYH. As we reflect on the meaning of this name of God, it is important that we understand this name not in the abstract, but as closely related to his involvement and action in the ongoing developments of the history of Israel. Hence, the context of this revelation of the divine name is very important. Though God was addressed through several other names, such as El Shaddai, El Elyon, it was to Moses on Mount Sinai that the official name of God as Yahweh was first of all revealed (Ex 3:14).

The Hebrew etymology of this divine name 'Yahweh' is a disputed one among biblical scholars. The LXX rendered it as "I am who I am" (*ego eimi ho on)*, the emphasis here being on God's changeless essence and being, that is, he is the God who eternally is, who is not affected by the flux and flow of time. The ancient Greeks, who struggled philosophically with the problem of the changing and the changeless, would have favoured such a view. But in Israel's faith the emphasis is upon divine activity. Just as persons disclose themselves to others through their words and deeds, so also God reveals himself by what he does. There is general agreement among biblical scholars that the name 'Yahweh' is derived from the archaic form of the verb *to be (hawah).* The Hebrew verb *to be* has a dynamic meaning that cannot be rendered by the English verb *to be*. There are other etymologies also proposed. W. F. Albright has interpreted the name as derived from the causative form of the verb *to be* and proposes that Yahweh is only the first word of the entire name *yahweh aser yihweh*, translated as "He brings into being whatever comes to being". The name, therefore, designates God as one who acts and gets involved in human history.[10] The most concrete form of God's involvement in history was the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It is within the context of God's activity in the history of Israel that he was revealed, and, hence, this name stands for his dynamic presence with the people of Israel. God reveals

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Hebrew YHWH was *Yahweh.* But because of the holy aspect of this name, it was withdrawn from ordinary speech after the exile and the substitute Hebrew ADONAI (Lord) was introduced. The still prevailing pronunciation *Jehovah* is the result of an erroneous combination of the consonants of YHWH with the vowels of ADONAI, added to it during the Christian times.

[10]See W. F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957, 15-18, 259-272.

himself as a force in the future of the people and not as an abstract being separated from history. According to another hypothesis, Yahweh was formerly the mountain god of Kenites, a clan of the Midianites, and Moses was initiated into the Yahweh cult through his marriage to the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian. It was while Moses was tending Jethro's flocks in the Midianite territory that he received a revelation from Yahweh. But the significant point here is not where the name came from, or even what its literal meaning could be. Rather, the important issue is what the name stood for in the history of Israel from the time of Moses onwards. The Israelites knew and worshiped Yahweh as the one who had heard the cry of their oppression, who had graciously intervened on their behalf, and who had led them toward a future full of promise. In Israel's experience, as interpreted by Moses, the name 'Yahweh' had only one meaning: "I am Yahweh who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."[11]

4. The Sacred and the Secular in the New Testament

It is interesting to find that in the Christmas narrative of Luke's Gospel the scene opens in the royal palace of Caesar Augustus in Rome, where the emperor orders a census of his *oikoumene*[12] to be undertaken. From Rome it moves to Syria where the Roman governor Quirinius proceeds to implement the imperial command. Accordingly, a young couple began to travel all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem of Judah where their child was to be born (Lk 2:1-7). Through this description Luke is trying to show the secular and worldly dimensions of the birth of Christ. Again, the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus opens with a description of its political and historical landscape in Rome, around Palestine and in Jerusalem itself (Lk 3:1-2). It goes to the credit of Luke, the great theological historian of the New Testament, who could relate the sacred events of Christian origins to the secular events of the days of King Herod (Lk 1:5), Emperor Augustus and Governor Quirinius (Lk 2:1-3), as well as to Emperor Tiberius, Governor Pontius Pilate, Herod the ruler of Galilee, Philip the ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis and Lysanias the rulers of Abilene (Lk 3:1-2). What Jesus of Nazareth did was not an isolated

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[11]See B. W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1957, 36-37.

[12]*Oikoumene* in Greek means the "inhabited earth," and during the early centuries it was identified with the Roman Empire.

exercise of his projects and plans. It takes the dimensions of the Roman Empire, the *oikoumene* of the then known world. As Paul said in one of his discourses, the Christ event did not happen in some dark corner (Acts 26:26) that nobody knew about; rather it was a public event known to all.

All the Gospels try to explain how through his ministry Jesus continued to be the dynamic presence of God in history. John has articulated this conviction through his very bold statement about the Word, which was with God in the beginning, becoming flesh and dwelling among humans (Jn 1:1-14). Mathew takes care to confirm his first statement about the Emmanuel – God with us – in 1.23 through two further statements about the continued presence of Christ in the community of his disciples, firstly, in the central part of his Gospel (Mt 18:20) with his promise of presence where two or three are gathered in his name, and later on as the conclusion of the Gospel in 28:20, where he declares: "I am with you till the end of the age." Hence, the last statement of Mathew is not about the ascension of the risen Jesus, but rather about his continued presence and action till the end of the historical process. Through this new assurance the eschatological expectations of Judaism were, once again, revised and a new awareness of God's presence in history was confirmed and guaranteed.

Some would argue from these reflections that what Jesus did and what he promised were aspects of a spiritual salvation that was inaugurated by him. It is precisely here that we have to reflect on the earthly and this-worldly understanding of salvation history in the preaching of Jesus. What Jesus brought with his ministry is the inauguration of the kingdom of God. Starting with the first beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Christian tradition has a vitiated history of understanding the kingdom of God as an otherworldly reality, to possess which all were asked to be poor in this world. But Jesus meant something entirely different when he brought the concept of the kingdom of God as the focus and controlling factor of his preaching. Taking a concept from its Old Testament background and its multifaceted understanding in Judaism, Jesus made the kingdom of God the central reality of his preaching, teaching and actions. According to Norman Perrin, the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus was a "tensive symbol," through which Perrin meant that it was a concept full of dynamism and vibrations. It was more a symbol than a specific

concept which had only its own limited meaning. It means that this concept can take on meanings which can accrue to it from the context, in which it is being realized. The focus of this concept is not on its static subsistence; rather its ability to assume new and contextualized meaning. On the whole, its dynamic meaning is that it is a situation of vertical and horizontal relationship in which God is revealed as the *abba*, the Father and Mother, of the entire cosmos, and the entire humankind is presented as a community of the children of God, within which they are all sisters and brothers. What this dynamic situation demands is not decided upon *a priori*; rather it is to be analysed and articulated in each historical, social, economic and cultural context. The kingdom of God is not to be understood spatially and geographically, but operationally as a new situation and as a quality of existence. It is to be understood as a realm of God's continued presence and operation in history. It is a deep symbol which summarizes the entire history of God's presence in the history of humankind, now continued in a much more universal perspective. In fact, Israel's entire history is the framework within which we have to situate the concept of the kingdom of God. Jesus consciously decided to make this symbol of God's kingdom the central theme of his ministry and message. He understood this concept in terms of the definitive coming of God into the history of the whole humankind.

The goal of this new approach of Jesus to God-human relationship was the building up of a new society characterized by equality, harmony and peace. Jesus tried to bring into this new situation all categories of people, many of whom were barred from the traditional Jewish concept of the covenant community. Hence, Jesus associated himself with the socially outcast, with the sinners and the tax collectors. He related himself freely with the Samaritans, with the Gentiles and thereby proved that the kingdom of God is a situation open to all categories of persons. Luke, in particular, takes extra care to show how Jesus was concerned about the poor and the outcast, and he is at the same time very critical of the rich and riches. Writing within the wider context of the Roman Empire, Luke found it necessary to broaden the horizons of God's presence in history beyond the Palestinian context. Living as we are in a world much larger than the Roman Empire, we have to understand the whole cosmos and its concerns as belonging to the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God is destined to gradually embrace the entire human history, both political, cultural and

religious, and also the whole cosmic and ecological order. It is this one and the same history, that Christians are expected to respect and promote as the salvation history embracing the whole humankind and the entire cosmos, in which they have to play a vital role in order to keep it attuned to God's guidance and control. The kingdom of God comes in not to destroy the human kingdom but to transform it and elevate it to new and noble dimensions.

This approach to the concerns of the kingdom of God and its relation to world history means that all issues in this history are part of the concerns of the kingdom of God, such as the history of all world religions, political history, ideological history, secular movements, ecological movements as well as liberation movements. Any effort to discard some of them as outside the concerns of the kingdom of God is not correct. All these movements work as God's agents and they all help the Church to have a clearer perception of God who is active in the history of the whole humankind and the whole cosmos. This is to say that world history is the same as salvation history and it is in this broad perspective that we have to understand salvation history and its operation in world history. The teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* is very relevant: "While we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age to come. Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God."[13]

5. Spirit of God Active in the World of Matter

The convergence of the sacred and the secular in the understanding of the historical process is given a new and challenging formulation in the theology of Paul when he wrote to the Romans about the final transformation of the material creation through the ongoing activity of the Spirit of the risen Christ (Rom 8:18-25). What we find here is how the entire material creation is included in the plan of God and is destined to the

[13] *Gaudium et Spes*, art. 39.

glory of a final transformation together with the children of God. What is significant about this approach to the secular is the conviction Paul had that the entire material cosmos is destined to participate in the fruits of the resurrection of Christ through which it has been proleptically incorporated into the salvation process. Paul introduces this idea about the final transformation of the cosmos not from a scientific perspective, but rather from a theological point of view about human suffering and its ultimate meaning in the death and resurrection of Christ. In Rom 8:17 Paul had introduced the idea that the full inheritance of the believers in the Spirit can be had only through a life of intense suffering with Christ. Glory through suffering, life through death, this is the hallmark of Christian life, according to Paul. It is the necessary pathway and it is unavoidable in view of what the world is. In order to explain the meaning of suffering in view of glory Paul brings in the picture of the general condition of the material creation. The human situation of suffering has something in common with the suffering of the world. In fact, all suffering, all imperfections and all unsatisfied aspirations and longings, of which the traces are so abundant in the external nature as well as within us, point forward to a time when all sufferings shall come to an end, all imperfections are removed and the frustrated aspirations, at last, shall be crowned and satisfied.

In this process humans and creation have to encourage each other. The creation encourages humankind insofar as it unfolds itself before them as something into which God has instilled hope, a hope that it will be set free from the bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (v. 21). Humans give courage and hope to the creation because in them the creation is privileged to see the beginning of a transformation and glorification, inasmuch as they have the first fruits (*aparche*) of the Spirit, a guarantee of the inheritance that is to come (v. 23). Paul sees in the marks of imperfection on the face of the nature, in the signs at once of high capacities and poor achievement, the visible expression of a sense of something wanting, but which will be slowly overcome. It is with this hope of consummation that creation undergoes its subjection to futility and decay. But this consummation will not come by any automatic process of development; it comes through God's own mighty action with universal meaning and cosmic dimensions.

In the midst of this high expectation Paul sees the creation engaged in a chorus of groaning. Before the final glory is revealed the creation

suffers like a woman in travail. The image suggests the preparation for a great joy, for the emergence of something altogether new through the crisis of acute and liberating suffering. But faith alone can discern in these phenomena the secret movement which is directing things toward a transcendent goal. If our modern knowledge of the material world yields a very different framework of thought regarding the future of the world, it matters little, provided the essential arguments of Paul are discerned and assimilated. It means that there is an organic relationship between the creation and the human species. Hence, the children also join the groaning of the creation inasmuch as they share the destiny of the creation as a whole. A state of patient expectancy is the present condition of the humans who live in the midst of a world of travail, where God also pursues his work with patience. The movement, which draws the humans and all creation towards their intrinsic ends, is gradually realizing the plan of God. No obstacle offered by history will be able to check the work of transformation undertaken by Christ and carried out through his Spirit. Neither the corruptibility of the world nor the inward weakness of the humans will prevent God from fulfilling his plans. It is God who is in active control of things. It is not that things will eventually straighten themselves out. God guides them, not with the object of assuring the petty happiness of some people who want to create a paradise on this planet earth, but with the objective of attaining that salvation and glorification which will be the crown of his work.

6. Church as the Authentic Sign of God's Presence in History

Our reflections on God's presence in history enlarging its horizons from the restricted dimensions of the Old Testament to the larger perspectives of human history, which was inaugurated through the ministry and preaching of Jesus, the Emmanuel, come to a critical point where we have to see the Church as founded by Christ having a mission to be the authentic sign of God's presence in human history. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church has very clearly formulated this idea when it calls the Church the "light of the nations" (*Lumen Gentium*). It is not a question of the Church substituting God's presence, but rather it is that the Church derives its vitality and dynamism from God and it carries on its mission in the world. Being visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly, this-worldly and other-worldly, the Church must empower herself to carry on this responsible task till the end of history. It is this Church that was rediscovered during the

Vatican Council II, a Church as the servant of the kingdom of God and also the servant of world where she has to be a dynamic presence of the risen Christ, transforming the world through the values of the gospel and the power of the kingdom of God.

Looking back into the history of the Church through the centuries, this mission and task of the Church were not always carried out in fidelity to the mind of Christ and to his gospel. It was not so much God's presence and power that were revealed in her actions and attitudes, but rather her own power and prestige. The Crusades waged by armed pilgrimages and military expeditions, sponsored by the medieval Church from the 11th to the 13th century CE, was a clear proof of the negative attitude of the Church towards other religions. It was a special form of the idea of the just and holy war, which loomed large in the history of the Western piety and thought for many centuries. The Crusades marked a new phase of the barbarian invasions and colonial occupation as well as a spontaneous outburst of pent-up religious ideas. Pope Urban II went to the extent of setting up the Crusades as a definite institution within the history of the Church with indulgences attached to it for those who took part in it. It was associated with the Papal will to power and also it was a special form of missionary zeal to dominate the whole world. Implied in it was also the effort of the Church to work out a Christian ethics of war. Consequently, the Crusades established a turning point in religion and spirituality and they always remain a black mark in the history of the Church.

The 16th century marked the beginning of colonial expansions and occupation of extra-European territory by what are called the "colonial powers" of Europe, which began with the geographical discoveries of the 16th and 17th centuries, and it followed very different courses in respect of politics, economics, religion and sociology. It is all based on the economic, military, and, to a great extent, cultural superiority of Europe associated with a certain amount of arrogance that was inherited from the Greco-Roman and the early success of Christian civilization. The colonial powers were fully convinced that they were specially chosen by God to dominate the world. Indigenous cultures were, thus, underestimated. Colonialism and missionary propaganda went hand in hand. Mission was understood as the expansion of Christianity sponsored and controlled from the West. Christianity assumed an attitude that there was nothing beyond it, that it could control everything, and that it can be the judge of all issues

in the world. This phenomenon was, to a great extent, the result of Christianity understood as identified with the Western powers, which continued to control the whole world through their colonial expansion and the accumulation of wealth from the colonized countries. To this were added the large-scale missionary expansion work of converting peoples to various Churches with a certain amount of competitive spirit. It is gratifying to see that Pope John Paul II has taken a lead to confess these and similar unholy exercises of the Church in history, for which he apologized to the whole world on March 12, 2000. It is the sincere hope of well-meaning members of the Church that this exemplary step taken by the Pope will characterize the future of the Church in her attitude to the world and to other religions. "The Church is always in need of a reformation" was a heretical doctrine till recently; but it is now understood as a necessary recognition of the truth about the Church that exists and operates in history. This renewal and inner reformation have to take place through an ongoing *metanoia*, and this is a demanding task and it is part of the costly discipleship and costly grace about which D. Bonhoeffer wrote in his *Cost of Discipleship*.

The ushering in of a new millennium constitutes a new challenge and a salubrious chance for the Church to re-define her role in the world and in history in terms of her important task of being the sign and sacrament of God's presence. The Church at various levels has to analyse and see where she has failed in the past, even as she offers gratitude to God for the great achievements she has made in various areas of her mission in the world. If the Church has to continue her mission as a continuation of the ministry of Christ, she has to re-dedicate herself to the dynamics of service and sacrifice. The Church has to create a new image of her real self and initiate a new thrust to prove that she is faithful to the mission entrusted to her by Christ. She has to assume the role of the little flock that has the assurance from Christ that the Father has been pleased to entrust the kingdom of God to her (Lk 12:32). In order to make this mission effective and meaningful in human history the Church and her members at various levels of their ministry have to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). Moreover, the Church has to look and evaluate issues from wider perspectives and relate all things to her transcendent and eschatological goal.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church has devoted a chapter to "The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church."[14] It refers to the future of the Church and history in terms of the restoration and re-establishment of all things in Christ. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* also dwells on the question of history and eschatology in a very realistic perspective. Christ through his life, death and resurrection sums up the meaning of history and he is now at work in the world through the energy of his Spirit, enabling people to look to the future with hope and at the same time animating people to work in the here and now towards that inaugurated future. Hence, we understand the importance of human efforts to build a better world and the struggle for justice within the overall eschatological plan of God. This teaching of Vatican Council II, on human development and earthly progress is very important for the way it succeeds in removing the traditional separation of individual and social eschatology, in linking the present with the future and in affirming a unity between the earthly and the heavenly realities. Any interpretation of eschatology that falls short of the requirements of our responsibility toward this world is not a truly Christian understanding of history and eschatology.[15]

7. God and the Fulfilment of History

Any historical process rooted in time is bound to have its consummation and fulfilment. This is also the biblical approach to history. Deriving inspiration from Trito-Isaiah, the author of the book of Revelation speaks about the end of history through the imagery of a new heaven and a new earth which God would establish at the end of everything, an event that has tremendous significance for the entire historical process which started with the creation of the world. In the language of Trito-Isaiah it was about an apocalyptic event through which the former things would pass away and a

[14] *Lumen Gentium*, art. 48-51.

[15] *Gaudium et Spes*, 39, 43: "The Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the gospel spirit. They are mistaken, who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come (Hb 13:14), think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation (2 Thes 3:6-13; Eph 4:28).

new era of prosperity would ensue. It would be like the restoring of the original paradise (Gen 2:9; Rev 22: 2,14; Is 11:6-9). The entire scene was centred on the restored Jerusalem (Is 65:9). It would be a restored universe and all would have happiness and there would be no suffering and pain (Is 65: 19b; 25:8). It would be a community of people living in harmony and peace, not only among themselves (Is 65: 21-24) but also with the animal world and the creation at large (Is 65:25).

Confronted by the ongoing persecution by the Roman Empire and threatened by the political situations prevailing in his own times, the author of the book of Revelation also gave articulation to his hope and encouragement to the persecuted Christians of his time through his consoling and assuring words: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaim from the throne: 'Now, at last, God has his dwelling among humans! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and pain; for the old order has passed away!' Then he who sat on the throne said, 'Behold! I am making all things new!'" (Rev 21:1-5). The expression "heaven and the earth" corresponds to the entirety of things and events. Here again it is a scene of prosperity and joy embracing the whole humankind and the whole world.

The most striking aspect of this vision of the eschatological fulfilment of human history as effected through God is the inauguration of a cosmic covenant in which God makes his dwelling place in the human community, taken as a whole: "Now at last God has his dwelling among humans!" It is to be clearly seen that God is not uniting himself with any particular religion, even with the Church; but rather with the whole of humanity. Religions are only means and at the end of history all religions shall have fulfilled their historical roles. God's ultimate concerns are about the whole humankind irrespective of caste, colour and creed. The expression "They shall be his people and God himself will be with them" is a covenant formula derived from the Old Testament. God established, first of all, a cosmic covenant with Noah promising him that he would never again destroy the earth through a flood and giving him the sign of

the "bow in the clouds" which is the sign of universality and wholeness (Gen 9:8-17). Once again, this concluding promise of a cosmic covenant in the book of Revelation at the end of all historical process brings together the whole of humanity, to which God promises his continued presence and to which God gives his blessings by making it one community of the children of God. It was this universal blessing that God had promised in the beginning when he called Abraham and told him: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3).

It is the task and privilege of all humans, living in these critical and blessed times of history to develop a new awareness of God as active in history. At a time when people begin to feel that they are all members of a larger human family and are belonging to a global village, where an unwanted and unwarranted terminology referring to the so-called First, Second and Third Worlds is being gradually avoided because of its bad taste, where religions are trying to transcend their doctrinal and ethical differences in a spirit of appreciation and mutual recognition, it is important that all become responsible to the world and to its historical and ecological processes. There is only one history and in it the sacred and the secular, the religious and political, the spiritual and material have their respective roles to play. By creating this cosmos as an intentional expression of his own inner dynamism, God has inaugurated the historical process, a realistic understanding and articulation of which we have in the Bible. This assumption does not mean at all that it is an exclusive understanding of history superior to all other articulations; rather it is a paradigmatic approach with a message for all. The beauty of this understanding of history will be enhanced through its readiness to accept similar approaches to and articulations of history in the religious books of other living and dynamic religions.

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REWRITING OF HISTORY IN INDIA: An Anti-subaltern Project

Ambrose Pinto♦

1. Introduction

The present project of rewriting history is basically an elite project meant to legitimize the rule of Sangh Parivar in the country. Modern History, after its liberation from kings and rulers was more engaged in common people and their struggles. There was a general acceptance that the role of great men and women cannot be overemphasized to the exclusion of the circumstances that create or throw them up and therefore it is masses that make history. Fictions were replaced with facts. Religious history was relegated to the dustbins and secular history gained importance. Myths, beliefs and dogmas were replaced by scientific facts and rationality. All of a sudden, with the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party to power, the writing of history has been politicized. The objective of all history writing at present is to serve the interests of the ruling elites and not to seek after truth or understand reality.

2. Ideology and History

It is the ideological element that has gained a lot of importance in history writing as a result of the rule of the Sangh Parivar. The impact of the ruling ideology on the writing of history is manufacturing of facts and data to serve the interests of the Hindutva brigade. Ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party with the support of the National Democratic Alliance took over governance, the political environment in the country has changed. So is history. We have moved from the Nehruvian era of commitment to secular polity and socialist economy to the Vajpayee times of communal politics and capitalist economy in the name of privatization and globalization; from the times when the freedom fighters presided over the country to the times those who opposed our freedom from the colonial powers have come to acquire power. Since independence, though the

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Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) did not get a legitimate share in the resources of the country, there were, at least crumbs thrown at some of them during the Congress regime in the name of affirmative action or as compensation for the historical injustice committed against them. The radical social agenda of land reforms, compulsory primary education and empowerment of women may not have happened. But the social framework of secularism and socialism within which the country was premised at the time of independence did provide some solace and comfort to marginalized groups. In the process, the subaltern groups had come to assert their rights to equality and justice. The affirmative action of the state was an attempt to include, at least, a portion of the SCs/STs and the subalterns into the mainstream. The climax was the Mandal agitation of the nineties where the backward classes were becoming conscious of their contribution to the nation and were no more willing to play a subservient role in the project of nation building. A large amount of literature and social science work centered on the contributions made by these groups to the Indian heritage was made available. The task of the present project of history writing is to reverse the assertion of the subalterns and to revive the age-old social order centered on hierarchy, inequalities and injustice through promotion of communal politics and capitalism.

3. History and Elites

In the present project of history writing the total mass of people are presented as of no consequence. The elites or the upper castes have been presented as makers of history. Ideology is a complicated intellectual structure. The group in power is aware that masses cannot understand the implications of ideology. Being basically a party of the upper castes and classes who have had better opportunities for education, the group has been able to manipulate popular imagination through myths, beliefs and dogmas and thus exhibit preference for conservative history. That exactly is the difference in the project of history writing between the conservatives and the progressives. The masses support progressive history. They need immediate gratification of their economic needs and they do not support ideologies that do not address issues of food, clothing and shelter. The progressive historians have an organic relationship with the people. On the other hand, the elite prefers history that can be used as a weapon to

oppress and exploit the masses. At the core of all conservative history writing is the desire to control economic resources. The subalterns do not anymore desire that process of production and distribution be controlled by the wealthy few. The wealthy through recourse to ideology desire to regain their age-old unjust privileges. The elites understand the full implications of any policy far better than the subalterns. Naturally, they support the conservative position though some among them may assume the garb of friends of the poor. To legitimize their position, intellectual jugglery has to characterize their various theories to keep the common people away from understandings. This is really what is happening to the project of history writing.

4. Kinds of History

Nietzsche in his book *Use and Abuse of History* talked about three kinds of histories, viz., monumental, antiquarian and critical. "Monumental is the idealized, heroic, and didactic analysis of the past; antiquarian, the archaist preoccupation with the past as dissociated from the present and future; and critical, a sober and analytic corrective by which the distortions of monumental and antiquarian history are remedied and reality is seen in focus. But the historical vision itself must be supplemented by the super historical, a vision of the as yet unrealized potentialities of man."[1] The present project of history writing is basically monumental and antiquarian, glorification of the past for which there are no historical proofs or evidences. The partisan historians, instead of resisting the government attempts, have romanticized all national activity and given prominence to few departments like the department of human resource development, science and culture to the neglect of all other vital aspects of socio-economic development. The hindutva group has built its history on racial superiority of the Aryan race. It is an officially sponsored history to suit the viewpoints of the group in power. Such history is national propaganda defeating the very purpose of scientific history. The role of all social sciences should be emancipation of the masses from poverty, disease and fear. Sadly, that is not the purpose of the present project at all.

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[1]Majumdar and Srivastva, *Historiography*, New Delhi: Surjeet Book Depot, 1988, 402.

5. RSS and History Writing

To understand the designs behind the present project of history writing, it is important to realize the goals and objectives of Sangh Parivar, the ideological front of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The goal of the Bharatiya Janata Party along with its other affiliates is to establish a Hindutva State. The word hindutva is used intentionally to distinguish it from Hinduism. While Hinduism is a religion and a way of life of the majority of Indians who profess Hinduism as their religion, hindutva is a political project to construct a Hindu state and thus promote the interests of the upper castes and classes. The Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the group that provides the ideological support to the group, spearheads the project. All those who have been entrusted with the task of rewriting history at present are from the RSS. The group has a reputation for manufacturing facts and twisting historical realities to suit their ideology. Jaya Prakash Narayan had opposed the RSS in 1979 after associating for long with them and said, "I have always condemned the Hindu *rastravad* of RSS because it is a dangerous ideology and is contradictory to our ideology of composite, Indian nation."

He had four reasons for opposing the RSS: "(i) The ideology of the RSS is communal and therefore incompatible with secular nationalism and democratic polity; (ii) RSS influences politics through manipulations under the camouflage of being a cultural organization; (iii) it has resisted any change in its communal ideology and fascist manipulative character; and (iv) its philosophy undermines the basic philosophy of Indian nationalism."[2]

The goal of the Sangh Parivar is to establish a Hindu rastra in the place of the secular state by unifying the Hindu society. "Hindu society is a fragmented one primarily because of caste and due to class relations as well... The Sangh Parivar's basis for unification of Hindu society is *dharma* (religion) and *sanskriti* (culture)."[3] By using terms like *dharma* and *samskriti*, the group desires imposition of a classical brahmanical social order in society. Caste is a heritage of Hindu culture and for the forces of the Sangh Parivar, there is no culture apart from caste culture.

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[2]Goyal D. R., *Politics by Proxy*, New Delhi: Quami Ekta Trust, 4.

[3]Goyal, *Politics by Proxy.*

That is why the Shankaracharya of Puri had no hesitation in advocating publicly low cost *swastika* temples for SCs/STs and converted tribals. Given their low status in society SCs/STs/OBCs and minorities cannot be treated as equals. However, the vicious designs of establishing a caste culture are never publicly promulgated.

J. A. Curran's observations are quite pertinent here: "The Constitution (of the RSS) gives no hint of a militant and intolerant advocacy of Hindu state. There is a basic difference between the formal profession of aims embodied in the Constitution and actual plans of the Sangh. The incompatibility of the pro-Hindu and anti-non-Hindu aims instilled in the membership is clear. The proclaimed philosophy is pale and even disruptive reflection of the real objectives of the Sangh. The camouflage is adopted in order to deceive public opinion and the government who are devoted to tolerance and basically opposed to fanatical hatred of any religion or community. In speeches, talks and discussions, the ideas of secularism are held to ridicule."[4] By using the slogan "all rights for all and special rights to none" the Sangh Parivar is against the affirmative action of the State for SCs, STs and OBCs. The group has always opposed special rights to minorities to preserve and celebrate their culture. The argument of merit has been used against the policy of reservation while minority rights are termed as appeasement. In the three year's of its governance, the party is perceived as anti-Christian, anti-Muslim, anti-dalit and even anti-backward classes.

The sole object of the Sangh Parivar in propagating their ideology is to create hatred among different communities and reap political benefit. Muslims and Christians are painted as foreigners, a target of majoritarian chauvinism. Pramod Mahajan, in an address during the Rath Yatra procession in Ajmer, asked his audience: "Are you children of Babar or Ram, Akbar or Rana Pratap, Aurangzeb or Shivaji?" By juxtaposing foreign Mughal conquerors with indigenous Hindu heroes, it provides a clear-cut exclusionary definition of national citizenship. In the case of Christians, the Sangh Parivar has cleverly chosen the issue of conversions from Hinduism to Christianity. In this fashion, the Christians are depicted as aggressors, using force or strewing foreign money in their attempt to

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[4] *RSS: How it Functions?* All India Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, 1.

overpower the Hindu community. By linking up Christians with Christian missionaries and, in turn, with foreign countries, the Sangh Parivar has attempted to strengthen the weak communal sentiment against Christians. According to Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Praveen Togadia, conversion to Christianity amounts to a change of nationality, conversion challenges our national unity. Conversions are termed as attacks on Hindu/Indian society. Such calls are not merely made by lower level functionaries. Even the Prime Minister Vajpayee and the other members of his cabinet have supported such statements.

The attitude of the Sangh Parivar forces is one of hatred towards minorities. How about their attitudes to non-Brahmins? Kancha Illaiah in his book *Why I am not a Hindu* says that the hindutva appeal is limited, and observes: "The Sangh Parivar harasses us everyday by calling us Hindus. In fact, the very sight of its saffron-*tilak* culture is a harassment to us... The question before me is not whether I must treat Muslims or Christians or Sikhs as enemies as the Hindutva school wants me to do. The question is what do we, the lower *sudras* and *ati-sudras* have to do with Hinduism or with hindutva itself."[5] The Sangh Parivar's *hindurastra*, therefore, is a nation built on the Hindu caste order with power, position and wealth with the upper caste or pure Hindus.

6. Education and Hindutva

The ideology of the party has been disseminated through education. The architect of the conspiracy of transforming secular India into Hindu *rastra* should legitimately belong to Murali Manohar Joshi, the Union Minister for Human Resource Development. The Sangh Parivar claims that the country had an indigenous advanced system of education based on philosophy and religion. The system suffered a setback during the colonial rule. Indian education was alienated and a foreign education was imposed on the country. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education document observes: "Then the British introduced their educational system based on grant-in-aid to institutions to impart their kind of education to absorb the products in the civil services. In this scheme, very little of knowledge, attitudes and skills that the local people possessed was considered fit for educational use and therefore totally discarded. Thus

[5]Kancha Illaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, Kolkata: Samya, 1995, 26.

indigenous educational system suffered a setback and the new system alienated Indian education from the wisdom, the belief and the value system of the people who were uprooted from their tradition."[5] Even in the post-colonial period, there were no attempts to Indianise the system. The national curriculum framework for school education developed by the national council of Educational Research and Training has been legitimized on the premise.

The limitation of the past is responded to, according to the Curriculum group that framed the National Curriculum Framework for School Education through strengthening national identity and preserving cultural heritage. The Framework notes: "Strengthening of national identity and unity is intimately associated with the study of the cultural heritage of India, rich with various hues... While, on the one hand, education should help in promoting a global world order, on the other, it should be seen as developing a national consciousness, a national spirit and national unity essential for national identity. At no point of time the school curriculum ignores the inclusion of specific content to forge national identity, a profound sense of patriotism and nationalism tempered with the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, non-sectarian attitudes, capacity for tolerating differences arising out of caste, religion, ideology, region, language, sex, etc. For strengthening the unity and integrity of the nation, it is essential that the cultural heritage, traditions and history of the different ethnic groups and regions of the country and their contributions are understood and appreciated in the right perspective."[6]

But the document at no point defines what the ancient Indian heritage was. If by heritage the document refers to the caste heritage no citizen of the country can feel proud. Instead of denouncing the caste order, what the document demands is tolerance. Any tolerance of India's oppressive caste structure is bound to perpetuate inequalities. One cannot think of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* without demolishing the unjust caste order. There are several other dichotomous statements in the document. The document wants to correct the erosion of moral and spiritual values during

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[5]*National Curriculum Framework For School Education*, New Delhi: NCERT, 2000, 2.

[6]*National Curriculum Framework for School Education*, 12.

the last five decades of independence by teaching value education through recourse to religion considered as the major source of value generation. The past experiences and the experiences of three years of governance of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP has provided the people of the country, the way the Sangh Parivar forces have handled education and inculcation of values. In 1999, an attempt to "Indianise, spiritualize and nationalize" education failed due to the opposition of several Education Ministers.

The Framework gives a key role to culture. The Sangh Parivar has provided a key role to culture in the revival of the party itself. The party that had just two seats in the Parliament of 1988, through manipulation of the Ram temple and demolishing the mosque at Ayodhya, was able to increase its tally to 88 and able to lead the coalition politics of India from 1998. The culture they have highlighted ever since in power is the hindutva culture, radically opposed to the secular ideology of India. Rewriting of history and doctoring of textbooks have been a part of their agenda. Though not a part of the freedom struggle, the chapter dealing with the freedom movement in the NCERT document provides respectability to the RSS and its leader, Sarvarkar. The orientations are blatantly communal. Medieval history is painted black. Stories from the epics, mythology and history have been prescribed to help students to understand culture, India's heritage and national identity. The hidden conspiracy to poison the minds of the students can be further elaborated by referring to an article on religions, written by K. K. Kaw, Secretary to the Human Resource Minister, Murali Manohar Joshi, that appeared in the November 2000 issue of the NCERT's journal of value education. With a view to undermine the egalitarian concepts in education and to further the brahmanic hierarchical ideology, Kaw attacks Islam, Christianity and Sikhism by stating that "greater damage to our intellectual freedom has been caused by traditional religions, especially by those which have a single book." For Kaw and his coterie, the Vedic philosophy that does not have the artificial distinction between religion and philosophy, penned in the style of scientific treaties is the only valid inspiration for cultural heritage.

In the name of Indianisation, nationalization and spiritualization, the proposal is to make Sanskrit, the language of the ancient religious texts,

compulsory for all. It is claimed that considering the contribution of Sanskrit to the development of Indian languages and its unique contribution to the cultural unity of the nation and ancient wisdom, it may be made a compulsory subject from class 3 to 10.[7] But why Sanskrit and whose language is it? In a globalized world why not German, Spanish or French? In the curricular reforms the girls are to be trained in home management and after the primary stage their curriculum may include training in home keeping. *Sati* is glorified in the ninth standard textbooks of Gujarat. Tributes are paid to the caste system for maintaining the age-old social harmony. The whole educational system in keeping with the heritage of Sangh Parivar is to strengthen Brahmanic hold over state and society by inculcating hatred against minorities, women and non-brahmanic groups. It is a set of dogmas, beliefs, myths and traditions legitimised by religion that has ensured power in all its dimensions to the Brahmanic class and has marginalized the SCs/STs and other subaltern groups.

7. Gujarat as Hindutva Laboratory

Gujarat is a Sangh Parivar state, known as the laboratory for experimentation of Sangh ideology. The textbooks of Gujarat are a good example to show how education is used to perpetuate the Brahmanic hold over society in Gujarat. The Social Studies textbook of 9th standard has stated caste, an oppressive institution that has destroyed the self-respect of millions of people in the country as a precious gift, demonized Christianity and Islam and glorified *sati*. Here are some of the examples:

The Varna System: "The *varna* system was a precious gift of the Aryans to mankind. It was a social and economic organization of the society built on the basis of the principle of division of labour. Learning or education, defence, trade and agriculture and service of the community are inseparable organs of the social fabric. The Aryans divided the society into four classes or *varnas*... In the beginning there were no distinctions of high and low. The *varna* or class of a person was decided not on the basis of birth but on the basis of his work or *karma*... In course of time, however, the *varna* system became corrupted and birth rather than vocation came to be accepted as the distinguishing feature of the *varna*

[7] *National Curriculum Framework for School Education*, 54.

system... Yet, the importance of the *varna* system as an ideal system of building the social and economic structure of a society cannot be overlooked."[8]

In the same textbook, the causes for the poverty and backwardness of the SCs and STs are placed on them and not the age-old structure of caste. "Of course, their ignorance, illiteracy and blind faith are to be blamed for lack of progress because they still fail to realize importance of education in life. Therefore, there is large-scale illiteracy among them and female illiteracy is a most striking fact."[9]

Demonizing Christianity and Islam: In a chapter titled "Problems of the country and their solutions," the same text-book labels Muslims, even Christians and Parsees, as foreigners. "But apart from the Muslims, even the Christians, Parsees and other foreigners are also recognized as the minority communities... The Priests of the Catholic Church had accumulated plenty of wealth through unjust taxes, illegal fees, ownership of large tracts of land, selling miracles and indulgences. They spent this money on worldly pleasures and immoral behaviour... Christian Church was a part and parcel of this integrated feudal system. Almost half of the land and other property belonged to the Bishops or the heads of the parishes. The Pope who was the head of the Roman Catholic Church was himself a big landlord. The Church received sumptuous gifts of land from the king as well as the lords. Thus the Church had amassed great wealth. The Pope, Archbishop, bishops and other priests lost their heads, forgot their duties and lived a life of luxury and sensual pleasures."[10]

In the textbook of history recommended for the third year B.A. students of Maharastra, the chapter on Mahmud of Ghaznavi reads: "The advent of Islam might have been a boon to the Arabs who got united under its banner, and were enthused by it to carry on conquests in Asia, Africa and Europe but it has been a curse for the people outside Arab world because wherever the Islamic hordes went, they not only conquered the countries, but killed millions of people and plundered their homes and

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[8]*Social Studies Text of Gujarat State Board,* Standard IX.

[9]*Social Studies Text of Gujarat State Board.*

[10]*Social Studies Text of Gujarat State*, Standard X.

places of worship and destroyed their homes, places of worship and above all their artworks."[11]

Sati as a virtue: In a chapter titled "Rajput Contribution," the New ICSE History and Civics, edited by Hart and Barrow, Part 1 states that "The Rajputs respected their women. The women too had their self-respect. They would burn themselves in the fire of *jauhar* rather than fall victims in the hands of their enemies... Rajput women were deeply religious. They spent most of their time listening to pious stories from religious books like the Ramayana and Mahabharata... The rich and the ruling class practised polygamy, though one of the wives was treated as the chief wife... It was considered a virtue to perform *sati*, that is, to immolate oneself at the funeral pyre of one's husband."[12]

Scant respect for womanhood is a part of hindutva culture. In 1987, the Vice-President of the BJP Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia justified widow immolation. The President of the party's Mahila Morcha, Mridula Sinha had justified wife beating and dowry.

Fascism and Nazism: Two extracts on Fascism and Nazism that are quoted from the 10th standard social studies books of Gujarat: "the views regarding the state administration adopted by the topmost leader of the Fascist Party, Mussolini, came to be known as the ideology of Fascism. According to this ideology, the state is sovereign. An individual exists for the state. An individual does not have freedom over and above the state. Here, everyone is absorbed within the state. Since the party firmly believed in militant nationalism, it opposed internationalism. National interest and progress were its basic aim..."[13] " Like fascism, the principles and ideologies for governing a nation, propounded by Hitler, came to be known as the ideology of Nazism. On assuming power, the Nazi party gave unlimited, total and all embracing and supreme power to the dictator. The dictator was known as the Führer. Hitler had strongly declared that the Germans were the only pure Aryans in the entire world and they were born to rule the world. In order to ensure that the German people strictly

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[11] *History of Maharastra*, Text book for 3rd B.A.

[12] Hart and Barrow, *The New ICSE History and Civics.*

[13] Social Studies Text Book of Gujarat.

followed the principle of Nazism, it was included in the curriculum of the educational institutions. The textbook said, "Hitler is our leader and we love him. Hitler lent dignity and prestige to the German government within a short time by establishing a strong administrative set up."[14]

It is a frighteningly uncritical presentation of both Fascism and Nazism. Not a word is said about the violent, uncivilized and brutal results of the politics of exclusion practised both by the Nazis and the Fascists. Similarly, the presentation on Christians, Muslims, Women and Dalits is far from being objective.

Hindu Culture: On the other hand, ancient India is presented as Hindu in all recent books of the National Council of Educational Research and Training. The conflict between the Dravidian and the Aryan worldview is not presented at all. It is mentioned that the ancient age begins with Vedic times. There is no attempt to develop any sense of historical enquiry. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education depicts Indian culture as inherently superior to any other. In the books of Saraswati Shishu Mandir, India is presented as the original home of world civilization.

8. Higher Education

At the level of higher education, the project of rewriting of history has been more direct and vulgar. The entire academic world has been tuned to spread the ideology of the Sangh Parivar through blatant means. Those opposed to the Sangh ideology have been denounced and replaced as bad historians and those who do the biddings of the Sangh Parivar have been promoted. Several of them have hardly any academics to their credit. The only criterion for appointment for teaching posts or to head institutions is loyalty to the Sangh ideology. In the whole process, the attack has been on reason. By developing large number of myths, dogmas and beliefs as facts and by manufacturing several other stories, history has been used as a tool for the promotion of the privileges of the already privileged. The following are some of the reprehensible measures that have been used to promote the ideology of the party in power.

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[14]Social Studies Textbook of Gujarat.

9. Appointment of Ideologues

Soon after assuming power in 1998, the Vajpayee government installed their own men as heads of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). B. R. Grover who dug up the archaeological evidence on Ayodhya favourable to the Sangh Parivar was appointed Chairman of the ICHR. Professor Sondhi, a member of the RSS was made the Director of ICSSR. There were several other appointments in the HRD Ministry and the States ruled by the BJP. Murali Manohar Joshi, an RSS ideologue was made the Minister for Human Resource Development. K. G. Rastogi, a retired professor and RSS *pracharak* who had claimed in his autobiography that during the partition riots he had shot dead a Muslim woman from being raped by a group of Hindu fanatics was nominated to a high power selection committee of National Council of Educational Research and Training, a body that recruits professors and readers for NCERT. In the hindutva ruled states, all Vice-chancellors and other major functionaries have been from the RSS background.

10. Rewriting of History Books

Rewriting of history has been a passion for RSS wherever the BJP has come to power. In the BJP ruled states of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat history textbooks were extensively rewritten to project the hindutva viewpoint. In Uttar Pradesh, during the Kalyan Singh regime, the history text was changed to include references to the RSS and its founder in chapters dealing with the history of the freedom movement meant to provide respectability to and legitimization of the role of Hindu communal organizations and their leaders. The fact is that RSS not only did not join the freedom movement but also even supported the British against the movement. In references to medieval history, there are plenty of historical falsehoods. During the Sultanate period, it is stated that the Hindus were merely paying taxes and were persecuted. The book that came out at the height of the demolition of the mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 was intended to inflame Hindu passion.

11. Attack on Secular and Progressive Historians

Simultaneously, there have been attacks on secular historians. The books

written by noted historians like Romila Thapar, R. S. Sharma, Bipan Chandra, Satish Chandra and Arjun Dev have been specially targeted. The reason offered is to remove the leftist bias in education. The two volumes of the freedom struggle entitled *Towards Freedom* written by K. N. Panikkar and Sumit Sarkar were withdrawn through an authoritarian government order. No secular historian is a part of the Indian Council of Historical Research today. One might ask for reasons for the attack? The reason is that secular historiography interferes with the RSS version of Indian tradition and nationhood. Besides, history is not merely the past of a nation but the crucible for building the nation's future.

12. Introduction to Hindutva Programme

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education observes: "Today, even more than ever before, there is a world-wide recognition of India's indigenous value systems. *Ayurveda* is being increasingly recognized as a holistic system of health and Indian psychology as a more complete discipline than the Western. In this context, it may be relevant to point out that there are domains of knowledge, which could be called 'parallel', indigenous, traditional, or civilisational knowledge systems. These belong to societies in the developing world that have nurtured and defined the systems of knowledge of their own, relating to such diverse domains as geology, ecology, agriculture, health and the like ... it may be reiterated that along with the contributions of other countries, the contribution of India to the world wisdom also needs to be brought to general notice explicitly. Paradoxical as it may sound, while our children know about Newton, they do not know about Aryabhatta, they do know about computers but do not know about the advent of the concept of zero or the decimal system. Mention may also have to be made, for instance, of yoga and yogic practices as well as the Indian systems of medicine like the *Ayurvedic* and *Unani* systems which are now being recognized and practised all over the world. The country's curriculum shall have to correct such imbalances." [15]

What does the above text mean? The objective may be to inculcate national pride. But there cannot be a completely uncritical view of Indian culture. It looks as if India has nothing to learn from the West. Vedic

[15] *National Curriculum Framework for School Education*, 13.

mathematics and Vedic astrology mark the entry of hindutva forces into the world of science education in universities. Astrology has been declared as science along with *jyothir vigyan* and *karmakand* as vocational courses. The University Grants Commission justifies the introduction of such courses by stating in its circular that "Vedic astrology is not only one of the main subjects of our traditional and classic knowledge but is the discipline which lets us know the events happening in human life and in the universe on time scale." What is shocking is that the highest educational body in the country has been unable to distinguish between science and superstition, or between science and rituals.

13. Conclusion

The objective behind all that is planned and implemented in the project of history writing by the forces of Sangh Parivar is to check the forces of modernization and restore pre-modern social hierarchies of caste, class and gender. The whole ideology is opposed to reason and premised on faith. Whether it is astrology or the exaltation of Vedas and ancient education, the purpose is to promote the upper caste Hinduism around the politics of Sangh Parivar. The faith based knowledge system demands subservience to the authority of the clergy and the Holy Scriptures. Dissent, if any, is seen as a threat to the descent-based hierarchies. In other words, the whole exercise is to produce conformist and uncritical citizens. It is the caste society that strengthened the hold of the Brahmanical ideology and clergy on Hindu society. The system discouraged reason and logic. The hindutva group had always opposed any emancipatory doctrine. In fact, even in the pre-independence era, it was the Brahmins and Banias that spearheaded the reaction to secular politics. When the freedom struggle opened up the rational and critical space the hindutva politics premised itself on Brahmanism. The objective of the Indian National Congress was to strive for secular democratic India while the *Hindutvavadis* desired a theocratic Hindu state. The battle lines were between reason based ideology and faith based knowledge. The ideological base of hindutva is pre-modern hierarchy based caste order, which aims to break the process of social transformation in the country. "This ideology, on the one hand, makes use of communal politics to create an external enemy for internal suppression of rights of the weak and, on the other, wants to impose the faith based knowledge systems to prepare the ground for the conformist society where

the pre-modern values and social dynamics can be passed off as the Hindu alternative to the modern/western values of liberty, equality and fraternity."[16] There is hardly any doubt that the modern trends of Indian historiography are inspired or at least influenced by the ideology of the Sangh Parivar to a large extent, deliberately seeking to utilize history for the spread of ideas which they have elevated to the rank of national policy to their own satisfaction.

We have been accustomed to see our past as a composite culture, integrating many streams. Such a plural framework is anathema to the RSS. We need to have an accurate presentation of our past. Fiction and myth cannot be made a part of history. So can we permit historians to divide this nation on the basis of religion, caste and gender? That is why the RSS project of rewriting of history needs to be a concern to the country as a whole. The Sangh Parivar has been scuttling the country's democratic process eroding the country's pluralist socio-cultural ethos with its divisive agenda. It has been involved in suppression of the rights of the marginalized, especially the dalits, minorities and women. We need to be on guard. The need is for all concerned citizens to rally round the banner of secularism and denounce communal history that negates the legitimate social and economic space for the subalterns.

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[16]Puniyani Ram, *Saffron Agenda in Education*, New Delhi: Sahmat, 2001, 61.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY OF INDIAN CHRISTIANITY AND CHALLENGES OF SUBALTERN METHODOLOGY

George Oommen♦

The attempt in the following essay is to do a brief appraisal of the historiographical developments since 1970s in the history of Indian Christianity, and to highlight some of the pertinent methodological aspects of Subaltern Studies with a view to appreciate it's implications for the writing of the history of Christianity in India. It should be stated at the outset that this is not an exhaustive study of the historical writings on Indian Christianity, and the sources cited are picked up as indicators of the general trends.

1. Nationalism

After the 1970s various perspectives have heavily influenced the writings on the history of Christianity in India. One of the most significant developments that emerged was a kind of nationalistic approach. Kaj Baago, a Danish missionary theologian and historian, particularly through the Church History Association of India (CHAI), initiated this move in a big way by his writings on the role of Indian Christians in the formation of Christianity in India. The undergirding nationalistic spirit in Indian participation and ideas was particularly focused upon in these writings. T. V. Philip, D. V. Singh, George Thomas and others have picked up these themes and developed it further. These writings reflected historians' opposition and protest towards the Euro-centred approach to the expansion and development of Christianity in India. The emphasis was on Indian nationalism and Indian contribution. Their task was to demonstrate how Indian Christianity has always been in existence and how an authentically Indian identity for Christianity has been developing over the centuries as a

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result of the interaction between Christianity and it's social and religio-cultural contexts.

It is in continuity with these efforts that we have to view CHAI's *History of Christianity in India* series. Although the series is not yet complete, whatever has been published so far maintains a wider and contextual perspective. For the first time in the historical research on Indian Christianity a much larger canvas has been spread out, especially taking into account the socio-economic formative factors that shaped an authentic and particular space for Christianity in India. The strength of this approach was in CHAI's efforts to integrate a nationalistic and contextual perspective. In pursuing this kind of history of Christianity in India the movement stated that, "The History of Christianity in India is viewed as an integral part of the socio-cultural history of the Indian people rather than as separate as of it. The history will, therefore, focus attention upon the Christian people in India; upon who they were and how they understood themselves; upon social, religious, cultural and political encounters, upon the changes which their encounters produced in them and in the appropriation of the Christian Gospel, as well as in the Indian culture and society of which they themselves were a part."[1] While re-examining the history of Christianity in India in this way, historians have succeeded in answering such vexed questions such as how Christianity and Christians have interacted and co-existed with the local milieu and yet keeping alive a unique identity of its and their own.

Dominant groups within Christianity, who were mainly following a Christian version of the Sanskritic strand got the most attention in these historical discourses. Moreover, Indianization and indigenization were some of the major themes of their narration. However, while searching for its own identity and spirit, it was the elite within Christianity who got more attention than others. V. S. Azariah, K. C. Banarjee, K. T. Paul, P. D. Devanandan were, for instance, the heroes of these processes. So it had fallen into the same trap of the secular national histories of the 1960s and 1970s, i.e., glorifying the role of the elites and the dominant groups.

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[1]A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. 1, 1984, Bangalore, vii.

If history is an unending dialogue between the past and the present, we should acknowledge that such a nationalistic reading is not necessarily relevant or even desirable today. That is so, not only for its obvious limitations, but also because of the monolithic character and agenda it can acquire. For instance, the Hindutva ideologues, like Arun Shourie, want to read or (re-read, as some of them claim) the history of Christian missionary work and the various movements on the basis of a monolithic understanding of Indian nationalism, integrity, culture and so on. This is the result of a narrow reading of Indian nationalism with an edge towards *Hindutva Vada* and the insistence that, that is the only way we should re-read history of all the movements in India. All histories should be written from this nationalist approach and everything written outside of it as anti-national historical approach, as Arun Shourie's *Missionaries in India: Continuity, Change and Dilemmas* (1994), asserts. The following two points he makes while perusing the history of Christian missions in India, are rather significant in the light of our observation: " ... I believe that the essence of the Indian people is their inner quest, and that this quest is and the means by which it is pursued are Hindu first and foremost."[2] He continues to state the following about Dalits and North-East areas: " ... a point that will become evident when we come to missionary work in areas like the North-East and among groups like the 'Dalits': I believe that the interests of India as a whole must take precedence – overriding precedence – over the supposed interests of any part or group, religious, linguistic or secular. I also, believe that, given the fragile condition of the structure of governance at the moment, the movements which are currently afoot ostensibly to 'liberate' and 'empower' these groups may well break India, that they will eventually bring upon even those groups the consequences that Bhindranwale's terrorism – much lauded by the 'Dalit' leadership, which in turn has been much lauded by the Church – brought upon the Sikhs." So re-reading of history is important – but not on the basis of fascist agenda of any religion or political group - but on the basis of all the objectivity that can be derived from the knowledge and experience of the subjectivity of a people; not in a monolithic way, but in a pluralistic manner capturing the particular history of peoples and groups who had been silenced over centuries due to structures of domination.

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[2]Shourie, *Missionaries in India,* 2.

It is against the background of such apprehensions about ethnic and particular local histories that we have to evaluate the histories written during 1980s and 90s on Dalit and Tribal Christian conversion movements in India. Thus, for the first time in the history of Christianity in India, focus has shifted from the Christian elite and the dominant to the people who were really involved in the historical formation of Christianity in India. Dalits and Tribals, especially the leading figures involved in mass conversions became the heroes of the narratives on Christianity. It was Geoff Oddie, a 'secular' socio-religious historian from the University of Sydney who pioneered this kind of people-oriented approach in understanding and explaining Christianity in India. A wave of Christian conversion studies appeared on the scene. The names of John C. B. Webster, J. W. Gladstone, Rajamanickam, Dick Kooiman, Ficher, may be mentioned here. These studies were the outcome of the people's perspective and "history from below approach" of the history writings. Thus, Dalits and Tribals found a significant space in the mainstream historical discourses of Christianity in an unprecedented way.[3]

However, this shift to people and masses was the result of the oppositional reading to the nationalistic, elitistic approach the historians of Christianity in India held. Issues related to ethnicity, caste, and the socio-economic factors which made people to move to Christianity, were discussed extensively in this strand. Growth of Colonial Economy, Hindu Renaissance, Caste and Neo-Hindu Reform movements, were perceived as the contexts within which these were taking shape. However, the most interesting aspect of this historiography of this period is the re-instatement of European missionaries as the major co-actors in the whole Christian people's movements and was seen by many as a positive process set in motion by colonization resulting in the humanization and liberation of these peoples. Moreover, studies on North-East Indian Tribal Christianity,

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[3]See for details, G. A. Oddie, "Christian Conversion in Telugu Country, 1860-1900: A Case Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavary-Krishna Delta," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 12, 1 (January-March, 1975); John C. B. Webster, *The Christian Community and Change in Nineteenth Century North India*, Delhi, 1976; D. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, London, 1970; S. Manickam, *The Social Setting of Christian Conversion in South India*, Wiesbaden, 1977; J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movement in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1984.

especially those of F. S. Downs,[4] particularly depicted the identity-restoring processes involved in such *en masse* movement of Tribals into Christianity. Removal of social disabilities and the humanizing effects it had on these people got the historians' attention during this time, and, consequently, missionaries were seen as important actors in the whole process. But the class affiliation of radical missionaries and the ideologies, which drove them, were subjected to close scrutiny during this time. Thus, while Indianization was the major emphasis of Christian historians in the 60s and 70s, during the 80s humanization and liberation processes were projected.

Both the above-discussed streams of historical approaches had taken the changing socio-economic context as one factor, which determines change and continuity in the ideas, events, processes, etc. Beyond doubt, one can say that class ideology seems to have influenced historians' subjectivity in this analysis. While caste factors were seen as significantly formative, class factors were not at all sidelined in these approaches. Thus, a creative tension between caste and class analytical tools seems to have helped the construction of history of Christianity in India in an unprecedented way. Further this has closed the traditional perception of a dichotomy between sacred and secular history. The fact that historical processes, whether religious or otherwise, were deeply embedded in the socio-economic structures and that the past cannot be constructed apart from these were explicitly accepted by the historians. This acceptance has affected the very basic doing of history of Christianity and methodological tools were seen in a different light altogether. In other words, it has come to be accepted that it is not historians' theological position which ultimately decides the quality of the historical writings but the very commitment to the historical methodology itself. The most significant shift of 90s, however, is to be seen in the role of theories in historiography and the influence of theoretical insights on the historical discourses.

2. Feminism

Feminist historiography and related methodological developments has really influenced historical research during the last ten to fifteen years and

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[4]F. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India*, Bangalore: CHAI, 1992. See also the books by Snaitang, Kipgen and Lalsangkima Pachuau.

there is an influx of feminist literature in India. The attention of feminist critique and analysis is on the exclusion, experience, and invisibility of women. The resultant alienation should be the starting point of the feminist reconstruction of history, they affirm. The patriarchcal silencing of women needs to be captured to understand the fundamental experience of exclusion and subordination of women in history. Both while reconstructing the autonomous space women had and while creating autonomous space in the present historical discourses, historians should deeply enter into the inner feelings and emotions and the subjected personality of women. They see this as the main task of feminist historiography.[5]

Despite the fact that there is a growing body of feminist history in India, it is unfortunate that feminist historiography is yet to find a significant spot within the studies on the history of Christianity in India. However, we need to mention a couple of significant feminist historical writings on Christianity by secular authors. One is by Uma Chakravarthi, *Pandita Ramabai: Rewriting History Through the Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, Delhi, 1998. Another is authored by Gauri Visvanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, Delhi, 1998. Uma Chakravarthi analyses how the colonial state had changed gender relations in a fundamental manner. She holds that the case history of Pandita Ramabai was not about silencing or invisibility but was one of suppression by the Brahminic patriarchcal structures and how she threatened the then Hindu nationalists. Whereas, Gauri Visvanathan examines through the life and experiences of "converts," the vexing issue of the role of belief in modern society, and shows how it is arguably one of the "most unsettling political events in the life of a society," basically it is a cultural study focusing on the role of religions in modernity, and demonstrates how religious ideologies can alter patterns of modern society. Also, in a recent article, Mary Roy depicts the status and place of Syrian Christian middle class women in the Kerala society.[6]

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[5]See Mary E. John, *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[6]"Three Generations of Women," in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, July 1994.

3. Post-Colonialism

It was the groundbreaking study of Edward Said's, *Orientalism*, in 1978, which inaugurated the emergence of post-colonial theories in historical writings. The following can be stated as the major affirmation of post-colonial theory; to analyse sources and documents on colonies and colonial societies produced by the colonial discourses, one needs to expose the ideology of imperialism itself and the historian's first and foremost task is to remove this mask of "ideological discourses on imperialism" from the colonial discourses. Further, understanding the reciprocal relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial power is so vital to post-colonial reading of history. Through colonial power, which was derived out of colonial knowing of the East, which was presumed to be inferior and different from the superior West, they subordinated the people and their minds. The historian's task is to decolonize the categories created by the West, which even involves liberating their imagination to create a vital autonomous space. "To be autonomous is to break through the categories of thought constructed by others, to think afresh and analyse one's predicament and make one's choices in terms one has rationally and independently arrived at."[7]

Several post-colonial studies on Christianity and Christian society and ideology in India have appeared recently. However, none of these studies are from "the church historians," with the exception of a study by Jacob Dharmaraj, *Colonization and Christian Mission: Post-Colonial Reflections* (ISPCK, 1992). This book is a missiological critique of the colonial missionary ideas. He deeply analyses how these have shaped missionaries' missional assumptions in the background of the rise of the nationalist politics. Let us hope that more post-colonial discussions by Indian Christians on Christian missionary work will appear soon in the field of the history of Christianity in India. In the category of post-colonial histories of Christianity in India, the following books by secular historians deserve our attention: Susan Baylay, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989; Hennriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society: Social and Religious Change in South India, 1840-1900*, United Kingdom, Curzon,

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[7] J. N. Pieterse, ed., *The Decolonization of Imagination, Culture, Knowledge and Power*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, ix.

1994; Antony Copley, *Religion in Conflict, Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; Kawashima-Koji, *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore, 1858-1936*, 1993.

How Christianity and Missionaries were involved in creating exclusive communal boundaries between communities and in the destruction of Indian pluralistic inclusive polity, find place here in these discussions. Further, themes such as conversions and the consequent conflicts of cultural identities within the Christian elite, evangelical Protestantism and the ideologies of imperialism, find space in these historical writings. One of the basic flaws of post-colonialism is the ideological assumption that colonial values have fundamentally and comprehensively affected every aspect and level of the colonized nation and society. Colonization affected only areas and countries which were integrally related to colonial power and agenda. We have to accept that colonialism has just added another additional nature to the already complex and highly pluralistic society of India. Don't we see more continuities than discontinuities in the so-called "colonial legacy?" So colonization processes should not be the over encompassing and sole framework within which historians work while analysing Christianity. Moreover, the very ideological premise of colonialism itself is a creation of the mutuality between the old and the new/modern consciousness. If so, should not we allow the emergence of a new consciousness based on our own ideologies, culture, self-hood and subjectivity rather than these theories, which continue to colonize our mind.

4. Subaltern Studies and Methodological Challenges

It is in the light of the above-mentioned perspectival and theoretical shifts occurring in the historical research of Christianity in India that we should consider looking at the path-breaking historiographical movement of Subaltern Studies Collective which came into being in India in the early eighties. The most significant moment in the development of this school which revolutionised the doing of history in India happened when *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (1982)[8] and Ranajit Guha's pioneering work *Elementary Aspects of Peasant*

[8]Hereafter referred as *SS I*, etc.

Insurgency in Colonial India (1983) were published. Since then eleven volumes and several other books have appeared representing this school of history. To start with, the movement was the brainchild of Ranajit Guha and a team of historians who collaborated with him in this new academic search. Guha edited the first six volumes and later other members of the collective have taken over this. Recently, Subaltern studies and their methodology have received international academic attention and it is recognised as one of the most unique Asian or Indian contribution to the academia.

Although started twenty years ago, only recently has Subaltern historiography emerged as a methodological challenge to be reckoned with by theological researchers. It should be noted that this movement has creatively challenged not only historians, but also other disciplines across the board in the theological field. It is in the light of this development that I want to apprise interested students of history about its vast possibilities for application. So in the following commentary on Subaltern Collective, the effort is to highlight certain methodological aspects that I consider relevant for theological research. The themes and issues and disciplines covered in the Subaltern Studies Series[9] are ever increasing and expanding, especially as recently seen in the volumes IX and X. For

[9]Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1982; Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1983; Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1983; Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi,1984; Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi,1984; Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi,1987; Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1989; Partha Chatterjee and G. Pandey, eds., *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, (1992), 1993; David Arnold and David Hardiman, eds., *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, Delhi, 1994; Shahid Amin and D. Chakrabarty, eds., *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1996; G. Bhadra, G. Prakash and Susy Tharu, eds., *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1999; See also, Vinay Lal "Walking with the Subalterns, Riding with the Academy: The Curious Ascendancy of Indian History," in *Studies in History*, 17, 1, n. s. (2001), 101-133; Ludden, David, ed., *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning, and the Globalisaton of South Asia*, Delhi, 2001.

instance, gender studies are finding more space than before indicating a gradual shift in focus. However, most of the earlier studies had concentrated largely on peasant movements, tribal rebellions and nationalist popular uprisings. In that sense, there is a wide range of assumptions and methods represented in the subaltern historical methodology. But we will concentrate on certain themes and issues, which will orient ourselves to the basic tenets of the Subaltern Studies.

5. Indigenism

The timing and the context within which the collective arose indicate the fundamental indigenous character of the move. Subaltern Studies emerged in the early 80s in an atmosphere of widespread negative response to Marxian orthodoxy in the academic research in analysing and understanding the Indian society and the nation. Indian socio-cultural reality was dissected mostly through the economic categories. The past and the contemporary happenings were viewed through the narrow glasses of class formations, and Indian people's and movements' subjectivities and pluralities were subsumed in such rhetoric of material determinism. So the Subaltern school may be characterised as a post-Marxian search to come to terms with the indigenous self of Indian society and look at its unique experiences on its own terms.

One of the dominant aspects of the post-independent history writing was the nationalist perspective that concentrated mostly on the colonial Indian experience. In fact, Subaltern School starts with a criticism of the historiography of Indian nationalism, which, according to them, has been dominated by colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. Both were seen as products of British rule, but surviving into post-colonial period in neo-colonial and neo-nationalist forms of discourse. Both hold that making of the nation and the development of the consciousness of nationalism as creatures of elite like administrators, institutions, ideas, etc. This colonised mind-set of the nationalist historiography came under the critical and incisive scrutiny of the subaltern historians.[10] Their starting point of a new historiography is nation and nationalism as against the representations of the elitist discourse.

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[10]See Ranajit Guha, "Some aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," *SS I*,1.

The defining of nationalism as Indian elite responding to colonial context and Indian resources and as collaboration and competition with the ruling power was vehemently opposed. Subaltern historiography rejected the view that these processes constituted nationalism and negated the projection of Indian elite and the middle classes as the primary agents of change.[11] They rejected the idea that nationalism was predominantly an elite achievement. Guha observes: "In the colonialist and the neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings – to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas."[12] He continues: "What, however, historical writing of this kind cannot do is to explain Indian nationalism for us. For it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and the development of this nationalism. In this particular respect the poverty of this historiography is demonstrated beyond doubt by its failure to understand and assess the mass articulation of this nationalism except, negatively, as law and order problem, and positively, if at all, either as a response to the charisma of certain elite leaders or in the currently more fashionable terms of vertical mobilization by the manipulation of factions."[13] So Subaltern historiography also can be perceived as a clear oppositional movement and as a post-colonial search to find the real locatedness of the agencies of change and transformation in the Indian society and to identify the *politics of the people* that are left out in the "un-historical historiography."

As we have noted earlier, historians continued to grapple with the issue of what constitutes Indian Christianity and Indian Christians' role in the process of Indianizing Christianity. They have often ended up marginalizing the vast majority of Christians who were rural based and part of the popular religiosity. The tendency to see Indian Christian formation in the movement from 'Mission' to 'Church' and the transfer of leadership from the missionaries to the 'elite' Indian Christian groups needs thorough revision in the light of the questions raised by the

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[11] *SS I*, 2.

[12] *SS I*, 1.

[13] *SS I*, 3.

Subaltern School. Where does the actual agency can be placed and can historians unearth the real locatedness of the processes in carving out an authentic Indian Christianity are some of the aspects to be looked into.

6. Recategorization and Deconstruction

Consequent to Subaltern school's search for new categories, which transcends several domains of human experiences and which included masses, they affirm that there is a subaltern – elite divide in society. The word subaltern is used as a synonym for people "of inferior rank." It is stated that, "it will be used ... as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."[14] For them it is the subaltern condition which largely constitutes historical and societal experience. Whereas, the term 'elite' signifies "dominant groups, foreign as well as indigenous." Officials of the colonial state, missionaries, merchants, planters, landlords, etc., are all included in this group.[15] Thus several of the categories such as caste and class are subsumed into this recategorised subaltern identity of the people. It may be noted here that the dynamics of domination and subordination fundamentally inform the subalternity. "For his subalternity was materialised by the structure of property, institutionalised by law, sanctified by religion and made tolerable – and even desirable – by tradition."[16]

This emphasis on subalternity paved the way for, perhaps, a post-Marxian categoraization of people which can transcend caste, class, ethnic, and tribal affiliations and take into account other more significant aspects of people's experiences. Because, for the Subaltern Studies considers "all aspects of the subaltern condition, material as well as spiritual, past as well as present" as important. It may be highlighted that some of the most important functional aspects identified are religious belief systems and the cultural dimensions in human experience and their formation and identity as a people. "As such there is nothing in the material and the spiritual aspects of that condition" of the subaltern which does not interest them.[17]

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[14] *SS I*, vii.

[15] *SS I*, 8.

[16] *SS* II, 1.

[17] *SS I*, vii.

Here is a clear rejection of exclusive materialistic view of human condition and existence. This perspective relates to history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity as well as the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems. Their approach is very clearly interdisciplinary by redefining disciplinary boundaries. Implications for biblical textual analysis, especially the sociological method that is being used now widely among biblical scholars may notice this profound way of looking at human experience. It may be noted that no primacy is given to the elite here. Objective assessment of the role of the elite and a critique of elitist interpretations of that role happen in this process.

So Subaltern Studies is a kind of an effort to hear people and their voices which were silenced by the dominant discourses, making them to speak in their own language, a language of protest, resistance and negation. For that, historians and others who are engaged in research should free themselves of the dominant narratives and materialistic categorizations. Let the silenced religio-cultural spaces be represented and recovered. These recategorization and recovery have direct challenge to theological researchers whose task is to understand human experience in a holistic manner. One of the most important contributions of this school was to consider the religious belief systems and the spiritual dimensions of human existence very seriously as a component in interpreting their actions and movements. This cannot be ignored as easily as we may think not only as theologians but as researchers concerned with too much scientific objectivity and as people dealing with empirical as well as imperceptive life realities.

It is a deconstruction of history that is taking shape in this collective venture. This deconstructive approach is based on certain additional affirmations of these historians to which we will turn now. One of the fundamental premises of the Subaltern School is that Subaltern is "the maker of his own history and the architect of his own destiny." Through various studies of peasant uprisings and tribal rebellions in India against landlords and at other times against colonial officers, missionaries, etc. in the form of resistance to elite domination, the Subaltern historiographers very clearly prove that the domain of Subaltern classes was an autonomous one, for it "neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence

depend on latter."[18] Although these subaltern movements were fragmented and sometimes lacked leadership these were clear articulations of their autonomous agency according to the School. The most significant development in the Subaltern methodological approach is the paradigm shift that they propose in the perspective that the agency of change is located in the subaltern. Thus the locatedness of agency and the autonomy within that location, in this case the subaltern, is the point of departure for the Subaltern Studies' worldview.[19]

To support their premises they have originated a "theory of consciousness" or collective consciousness within the subaltern movements. Their point is that no movement arises merely out of spontaneous action. The most important functional change identified in resistance to dominance is from religious to the militant in many happenings in the Subaltern Studies. As a result of this approach "movements [are] pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition and thus seen in relation to histories of domination and exploitation."[20] Unlike the Subaltern perspective most other histories until recently regarded peasant insurgencies, subaltern movements, etc. as external to these peoples' consciousness. Many actions were seen as imitations and emulations. For instance, the Sanskritization model to understand low caste movements proposed by the famous sociologist M. N. Srinivas, could be seen as denying this autonomous agency to the groups involved. In subaltern approach autonomous consciousness is one of the major sources of investigation of any people or group. One of the contributions of the subaltern group was to stress the position that consciousness of people is not an exclusive product of economic base of the society but the result of a complex process which includes religious and spiritual. Primacy given to 'nation' and economic base by the Nationalist-Marxian writers is questioned by the Subaltern School and gives a paradigmatic shift to the method of analysing society and people.

What is happening in this methodology is the restoration of subject to people that were either silenced or taken away by elitist discourses. Thus,

[18]*SS I*, 4.

[19]See for details, Gayatri Cakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *SS IV*, 330ff.

[20]*SS IV*, 330.

the claim of the Subaltern School is that now we are able to arrive at indicators of the peoples' subjectivities and it takes shape on their own terms. So the unique contribution of Subaltern historiography is to challenge researchers to identify signifiers of these subjectivities in the location that they are studying whether they might be Dalits, women or Canaanite woman who is in conversation with Jesus. Thus, we are challenged to consider that the subaltern is also 'operating in the theatre of 'cognition'. Of course, Subaltern School does not claim that this consciousness is completely recoverable as the signifiers that we look for may not always reveal it completely or that it may be received signifiers. But the School calls this the "negative consciousness" that emerges out of the negation of dominance, in inversion [as against conversion] or appropriation of the elite perceptions. Spivak, one of the co-travellers of the Collective, makes the following critical statement: "This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him/[her], persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility."[21] When we want to recover life and subjectivity to a character or people while theologising or capturing their story what we need to do is to activate and enter into the subjectivity as far as possible and then start the reconstruction.

"Maker of his/her own destiny" claim by the Subaltern School is partly problematic because despite the autonomous consciousness they talk about, how the inner subjectivity is produced and whether it is an entirely inner process independent of external impositions is not clearly dealt within this question. But their argument would be that external influences would be appropriated in line with the subjectivity of a people. Subaltern autonomy is not absolute always. It is relative. But it can be within the conscious domain of the subaltern since their aspirations and views of the world have no common ground with the domain of the elite life and politics. So Subaltern School will hold that a subaltern history may reveal the "subject with distinct mind and energy of its own."[22]

Subaltern School remains bound to the categorization and intellectual framework of almost two conflictual domains, the domain of the elite and the subaltern. Conflict is the premise on which they work. Thus, there is no

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[21] *SS IV*, 336.

[22] *SS V*, 234.

frame of reference to explore the human experience in the common domain where people interact and movements and communities meet creatively. Moreover, historical discourse need not always be products of two contradictory domains. Many issues with which historians of Christianity in India are dealing with might not be disjuncted movements or groups. Many domains of Christian formations were results of mutuality and complimentarity despite the fact that caste and default lines of untouchability still exist within Christian communities. While the elite-subaltern divide will greatly enhance historians' effort to attribute subjectivity to peoples and marginalized groups, critical rejection of such an irreconcilable domain in human experience might not be out of place in our use of this methodology. Because, both in the religious and the cultural space the interface between the dominant and the subordinated will be crucial to perceiving the reality. Indian Christianity and faith articulations are many a time products of hybridity and mutuality. Further, the route of the upward mobility of many Christians was part and parcel of a constant process of continuity and change.

7. Rereading of Texts

This brings us to the issue of sources of historical construction. What are the sources for establishing subalternity considering the given nature of the texts with which we have to work with? How will they counter elitist discourse when most of the literature is produced by the dominant themselves? They deal with it in various ways. Subaltern Studies take text very seriously and as a consequence, the method of reading it. In a sense, by attributing a collective consciousness with an agency of their own for the subalterns, the Subaltern Studies is proposing a theory of reading, which could be called rereading. Their position is that all texts are products of an agenda and there is nothing like a neutral or objective text, narrative or evidence. Every text, knowledge, information is a product of an affiliation, politics and agenda. However, Subaltern Collective has produced tools for critical reading of text in favour of the subaltern, even if the sources of information are almost entirely the creature of the dominant.

Ways of knowing history came under close inspection, especially the literary sources on which historian relies, and in that process culture became one of the focal points from which historians began to view historical happenings and the meaning systems represented in the actions

and the beliefs of the people. So, in that sense Subaltern Studies perceive historiography as a mediator. Thus, the very doing of history of people, particularly of South Asia, takes a shift. So these post-colonial writings broke new grounds in reading or rereading the colonial texts produced by the mind which was committed to a colonial mind-set and who perceived reality within the environment of colonialism, whether they were Indians or foreigners.[23]

The aim of the rereading in subaltern methodology is to show how the colonially committed voice which we find in these texts are not only colonial knowledge but how the form of this knowledge includes the subtext of the consciousness of the peasant. So he shows how the decoded text represents the consciousness of the peasant and the original colonial text represents the text of counter-insurgency. This poseś definite challenge to historians of Christian mission and related aspects of Christianization in India. Missionary texts could be decoded to bring out the story of the people who were the real subjects of these movements.

When we consider a text in historical research the primary tendency is not only to investigate the context within which the text has been produced but also to establish bias so that historian can arrive at a positive narrative. This should not be the main venture of the historian because every text by the dominant is "produced within well-defined fields of power."[24] So the position of subaltern school is that it is the historical discourse which needs to be analysed and not necessarily the bias of the writer of the text. Guha would go to the extend of stating the following: "Criticism must therefore start not by naming a bias but by examining the components of the discourse, vehicle of ideology, for the manner in which these might have combined to describe any particular figure of speech."[25] Further, some process of distortion might and should happen when interpreting data from the past as the sources are always distorted in itself due to the fact that all are discourses of subordination or domination. In fact according to subaltern school "an element of distortion is built into the very optics of historiography and, this being the case, the best one can look

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[23]See a critical reappraisal of Subaltern Studies in David Ludden, ed., *Reading Subaltern Studies*, New Delhi, 2001.

[24]*SS V*, 167.

[25]*SS II*, 9.

for is to reduce the distance between past consciousness and the historian's perception in order to achieve a closer approximation."[26] This is connected to the question of objectivity in history. Our objectivity should come out of our ability to establish the image of self or the subjectivity of a person or a movement under investigation. Still one can only strive to be as objective as possible and subjectivities at various levels will remain as a reality in all discourses.

Subaltern historiography has also raised issues about the relationship between discourse and objectivity. The post-modern position is that there is nothing like objective reality which can be recaptured because all the discourses and language itself are products of power. But Subaltern School points out that although all discourses are subjective and there is nothing like objective history possible through their methodology, they prove that it is possible to unravel certain realities behind the discourse and the text: the text behind the text. So when we read a text what is important is to unravel the power structure behind the production of the discourse and the capturing of the consciousness of the subaltern reflected in the discourse, perhaps negatively. Thus, representations in a discourse have to be translated into a level of representativeness.

8. Redefining Texts

What constitutes a text is also another question that the Subaltern Studies' raises. In fact, one of the criticisms against them was their dependency on literary sources. However, this is not entirely true. There are ample evidences to demonstrate that they redefine the very understanding of text. As a result rumours, myths and popular religiosity, rituals, etc. are all put to critical use to unearth the rebellious consciousness at work in the movements that they study. Recovery of the oral text is also part of the project. The best illustration of that is to be found in the excellent articles by Shahid Amin on Gandhi and popular perceptions of Gandhi in the minds of the subalterns. His work on Gandhian movements show how popular ideas among common people were at radical variance with those of the leadership and in opposition to some of the "basic tenets of

[26]See Asok Sen "Subaltern Studies: Capital, Class and Community," in *SS V*, 234.

Gandhism itself."[27] This challenges studies on Dalits, Tribals and women to explore extra texts available within the non-mainstream literary sources.

The whole premise of the Subaltern Studies based on the elite-subaltern divide, on the one hand, liberates the academia from depending on straightjacket forms to either the class theory or the caste theory. Because there is no "one is to one" relationship between lower caste positioning and economic poverty. Further, most of the studies on the institution of caste now prove that 'caste' has been part of a dynamic process which was in formation all the time and that material conditions have played a role in shaping the dynamics of this formations. On the other hand, the Subaltern School ignores the fact that the fault line of untouchability was perpetuated throughout the history of caste relations, and Dalits were victims of that fault line. How do they account for this not very clear when they hold that caste need not be an exclusive categorical tool in the analysis of Indian society and people. The post-colonial mode of the analytical framework takes away the initiative to look at the equally significant lower caste or Dalit protest movements although several Dalit studies make use of the insights from the Subaltern School in a creative but hybrid manner. What constitutes evidence and what are historical sources are very important issues for subaltern historians. Thus the unwritten, religious cultural 'texts' and orality were brought into the mainstream of historical methodology as against the western methodological tools which emphasise on written documents for evidence. Thus the dismissed and marginalised subjectivity of peoples during the colonial and the post-colonial period is reconstructed through the help of orality. Thus, ultimately the people themselves become the sources for historical writings.

The subaltern perspective, at least partially, seems to have influenced many recent works on the history of Christianity in India. These histories hold that, without considering the subalternity of Dalit Christians, one cannot fully unravel the history of Dalit Christians and their conversions in India. Thus, a re-reading of Christian conversion movements in India is emerging as a result of this realization. Thus these religious conversions are seen in continuity with their pre-Christian belief systems and pre-

[27]See Shahid Amin, "Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura," *SS V,* 166.

existing rebellious consciousness. These historians who use the Subaltern perspective explain how Dalit conversion movements in India were clear protest movements against the dominant castes on the basis of their own autonomous subjectivity. The most significant contribution of this subaltern strand in the historiography of Christianity is the effort of historians to enter into the arena of belief systems, and cultures of peoples involved. The worldview of Dalits, influenced by beliefs in spirits, gods and goddesses, especially offers a rich field of research. Oral tradition and oral texts have found a prominent place in this method of research. Religio-cultural continuities and discontinuities in subaltern Christianity are made clearer through these historical studies. The works of Dick Kooiman, George Oommen, Geoffrey Oddie, etc. are some partial attempts to demonstrate how the subaltern perspective can be a very useful tool in writing the history of Christian Dalit movements.[28]

One of the major contributions of the influence and the role of social theories is that it helps the historian to discover and unearth the hidden and silenced spaces in history. So historians should use critical tools offered by modern theories such as Subaltern Studies. It will definitely enhance the process of deconstruction and decategorization which is vital to the doing of history and recapturing of the inner and deeper attitudes, ideas and beliefs of peoples and movements. However, at no moment historians should declare their subservience to a theory. Wherever theory may distort actual 'facts' and 'truths', and above all the subjectivity of the past, it should be applied cautiously. The ultimate test of the relevance of a theory or theories in historical research should be the recovery of the subjective experience of the past.

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[28]Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality*, Delhi, 1994; George Oommen, "Dalit Conversion and Social Protest in Travancore 1854-1890," in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 27 (September-December 1996); George Oommen, "Re-reading Tribal Conversion Movements: The Case of the Malayarayans of Kerala, 1848-1900," in *Religion and Society*, 44 (June 1997); George Oommen, "Strength of Tradition and Weakness of Communication: Central Kerala Dalit Conversion," in Geoffrey Oddie ed., *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia: Continuities and Changes*, UK, 1997,

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INEVITABILITY OF REWRITING INDIAN HISTORY FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

V. S. Elizabeth♦

It was Voltaire who for the first time put forth the idea of history as philosophy. Since then even this idea of what does History as Philosophy mean has been debated. As a result there can be no single answer to the question what is history. The nature of history as a body of knowledge and the nature of the sources of history make it difficult, if not impossible, for all of us to have one common understanding of history. For we see the past through someone else's eyes, someone whose knowledge of the past depends on her own views, her own 'present'. Besides, the whole past cannot be recovered, it is only fragments of it as has been recorded by the then historians, or what has been discovered and unearthed that can be compiled and interpreted. Every fact can be interpreted in many ways depending on what we are looking for and why. While historians do not invent facts, they prioritize facts and ignore others. Since, to a great extent, history is an interpretation of such evidences that have come down to us, history that we read is the interpretation of the historian. Therefore, the idea of history that any people hold is a reflection of their view of society at that particular time in history. This explains why even the very focus of history has varied from age to age. This also explains the absence of women in history. After all who has written history so far? What has been the dominant view of history? What has been the object of the history written so far?

In the nineteenth century, in Europe, in the context of the industrial revolution and the emerging liberal philosophy and the democratising processes people were interested in constitutional and political history. In a situation where women were not even recognized as legal persons and, thus, not enjoying equal status in the society, women were not written about or they were, almost always, made subordinate to the main theme.

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Even in the twentieth century the meaning, understanding and purpose of history as understood by historians in that period was not the same. While some studied economic history, others chose to study intellectual history and yet some others examined the possibility of a "total history" but to almost all of them, women in the respective societies and periods have been as good as non-entities.

We see that just as E. H. Carr suggested in 1961, history is a "constantly moving process, with the historian moving within it,"[1] that it is "a dialogue between the events of the past and progressively emerging future ends. The historian's interpretation of the past, his selection of the significant and the relevant, evolves with the progressive emergence of new goals."[2] He was writing in the context of a society that seemed to have lost all hope in the future in the aftermath of the world wars and the economic depression. He was trying to inject renewed interest in the world and especially in the future. In this context, for those of us who live in a world in which democratic values, including equality, are the determining factors of state and law a relook at what history is becomes extremely necessary.

Writing in 1976, Jean Chesneaux said that one should go beyond asking what is history, to what is history for. Quoting Lu Xun he said: "For whom are you writing?" is the basic question. "The past is both a stake in current struggles and an essential factor in the political relationship of forces."[3] To be able to create spaces within civil society various groups have been using history as an instrument to legitimize their claims, to create an identity for themselves. The ruling classes, the dominant groups are past masters in such a use of history and have been delegitimizing the claims of the marginalized groups in favour of maintaining the status quo, which will continue to leave them in a position of power. Thus, when the marginalized groups organize on their own they have to empower themselves by rewriting history in order to write themselves back into the past from which they have been displaced. This

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[1]E. H. Carr, *What is History?* New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1964, 133.

[2]Carr, *What is History?* 123.

[3]Jean Chesneaux, *Past and Futures or What is History For*? London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, 2-3.

enables them to assert their rightful place in the society of the present and that of the future.

In the ongoing social and political struggle of the various marginalized groups, especially women, it is very important to reject "the Establishment version" or, as Keith Jenkins would put it, the dominant version of the past and build their own relationship to it.[4] The dominant version disempowers women by writing them out of history. The past is interpreted from a dominant male perspective and the women appear as mere *appendages*, as *nobodies*, as people who did not contribute to the evolution of human society. As human beings and individuals, our memory helps us grow from stage to stage by recording the good and the bad that we have been part of, so that we may learn and give ourselves a sense of self. For centuries historians have been doing this and by undermining or marginalising the role of women in history they have destroyed women's sense of self and their place in society. This explains why women see themselves only in auxiliary roles, supporting men as they, the men, go about the business of life, thus denying themselves and their children the reality of their experiences and the ensuing contribution. Having presented history from the male perspective, women, then, are viewed as a burden to society, and, therefore, the low status accorded to them is justified. Apart from that there is the need to identify oneself with one's society's past. How can anyone do that if her history has never been recorded or written about?

It is in this context that one has to understand what Jean Chesneaux has quoted in his work *Pasts and Futures or What is History For?* "The repossession of our history is the first step toward the repossession of ourselves, a precondition for the repossession of our future."[5] For the future of our society to be better than the past it is our understanding of our past that will help us find the best way there. This is because historians analyse, rationalise, provide symbols and stereotypes that enable us to move from one period to another. So, if we want a future in which women and men will be equals despite their differring roles and functions,

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[4]Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, London: Routledge, 1991.

[5]Leandre Bergeron, preface to the *Petit Manuel D'histoire du Quebec*, Montreal 1972, cited in Chesneaux, *Past and Futures*, 26.

if we want a future where every individual will be valued for whatever he/she contributes to society without some kind of functions being prioritised over others, then it is important that we take control of the history that is being written.

If we agree that history is a discourse then we have to acknowledge that it "is a shifting discourse constructed by historians and that from the existence of the past no one reading is entailed: change the gaze, shift the perspective and new readings appear."[6] Against this background, the need for a reinterpretation of history, especially Indian History, from a feminist perspective becomes natural. For every discourse in its operation, includes and excludes actors, events and issues. As a result, we find that women have been omitted in the narrations about our society's past. This has been done despite the fact that "Women have been active, competent and important through all the ages of man, and it is devastating for us if we do not understand this. But history is also without meaning for men if the centrality of women is denied. Like racist myths, these one-sided accounts of the human past are no longer acceptable: intellectually spurious and devoid of explanatory power, they more and more betray the void of unknowing at their heart."[7]

To read a general history book is to come away wondering what were the women doing while the men fought battles, ruled the country, administered justice, produced food and articles for the society. The men did all the hard work and it looks as if the women had a good time living off men's efforts. To find evidence of women's existence in history is difficult. This is for the simple reason that records of their deeds are rarely there and when their actions have been recorded the women were considered too insignificant and, so, their names were omitted. Further even where their names may be recorded and their actions too the historian interpreting this data ignores that information as his focus does not include the activities of the women and therefore his narration omits this information or glosses over the role that women played in that specific context. This may often be the case even where the women were crucial to a particular transaction or a particular event.

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[6]Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 14, 15.

[7]Rosalind Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, 16.

The reality, however, is that women have done a variety of things which has made possible the evolution of our society down the ages – be it giving birth, working in the fields, cooking for the family or community, or nurturing and caring for the young, participating in the social movements for change. Yet all this and more are forgotten in history because of the narrow, and almost, exclusive focus on the actions of men of the dominant sections of society. This version of history is an incomplete history. It cannot be treated as the universal history of the entire humankind.

Women are there in history as a general body of women, as mothers, wives and daughters needing the protection of men. They functioned neither as subjects nor objects of men's activities. Any activity or record that included women was that which served men's goals or satisfaction of their desired objectives. The best example would be the socio-religious reform movements in British India during the nineteenth century. In *India's Struggle for Independence* it is stated that "The campaign for the improvement of the condition and status of women was not a purely humanitarian measure either. No reform could be really effective without changes in the domestic conditions, the social space in which the initial socialization of the individual took place. Women, in fact, played a crucial role in this process. Therefore, there could be no reformed men and reformed homes without reformed women. Viewed from the standpoint of women, it was, indeed, a limited perspective."[8] Thus, the much touted social-reform movement of the nineteenth century was not seeking to make women's lives better but was aiming at changing certain aspects of their lives in order to create women who will rear men who would be able to fit into the new society they sought to create. This means that the women were marginal to the movement which also explains why the women were never consulted regarding what they wanted.

Women's history has just begun to be written as a result of the awareness and empowerment made possible through education, democratic political processes and changing social and economic situations. Writing women's history cannot only be the creation of the female equivalents of male figures of authority and ability. Women are no

[8]Bipan Chandra, et al., *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947,* Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990, 88.

doubt competent to assert authority and administer society like their male counterparts but this would not be the history of the majority of women who did not have the opportunity or the desire to participate in these male dominated activities.

Considering the fact that men have had a head-start in collecting evidence, documenting and writing history it is a difficult task to uncover women's history and in attempting to do this it might seem as if there is over-emphasis on women's role in history but what must be remembered is that for too long history has been weighed down on one side. It may, therefore, seem necessary to counter-balance that lop-sided emphasis by bearing down heavily on the other.

To the argument that both men and women have been marginalised so why should women be singled out for special pleading, Rosalind Miles response should answer. "The male peasant, however poor and lowly, always had the right to beat his wife; the black male slave, though he laboured for the white master by day, did not have to service him by night as well. Nor have changing social conditions had the same impact on men's and women's lives – the industrialization of Europe and America in the nineteenth century that improved the quality of so many people's lives, itself depended upon the introduction of the ferocious consumerism that more than anything else has devalued women in twentieth-century society."[9]

What does it mean to rewrite history from a feminist perspective? It can mean several things depending on who is writing history and why. Rosalind Miles is concerned with two key questions: How did men succeed in enforcing the subordination of women? And why did women let them get away with it? To subaltern historians it could be important to explore the range of meanings imbued in women's speech for women themselves. To others it would involve recording the different activities and actions of women in the past and wherever possible in their own voices.

[9]Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, 16.

In the context of Indian history we could explore the different time periods using these different approaches which would be a tremendous task for anyone to even attempt. There have been several historians, women and men who have already done considerable research in the context of colonisation, nationalism and women, and it would be useful to examine, at least, a few such works here. We have Kumkum Sangari, Janaki Nair, Gayatri Spivak, Kamala Visweswaran, Susie Tharu, Tejaswini Niranjana, Lata Mani, as a few examples of historians who have been considering the question of writing history from the women's perspective and the issues arising out of it.

Subaltern Studies have broken the ground in Indian history writing by raising doubts and uncertainties with the dominant discourse of history. Their approach in several studies that they have published has brought to light many new aspects of the events that have already been discussed and more often bringing to light ideas and narrations no one had even thought of before. Understanding the subaltern perspective of several of these events like the 1857 upheaval, the Chauri Chaura, the peasant and tribal uprisings, has enabled us to see the agency that the subaltern has always exercised but been denied in the imperialist, nationalist and even in the Marxist histories. However, even this school of thought, in their analysis, has glossed over the gender questions involved. Critiquing the subaltern historians approach to gender, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her discussion on "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" in *Subaltern Studies* IV, writes that while the subaltern historians have been very careful to consider questions of women suffering because of gender discrimination they tend, however, to "overlook how important the concept-metaphor woman is to the functioning of their discourse." Citing an example of subaltern-led revolts in the early nineteenth century she points out how on two occasions the struggles began because the men were unwilling to accept female leadership:

> With the deposition in 1836 of Ananta Bhupati, the 17th Zamindar of Golgonda, the Collector of Vishakapatnam installed Jamma Devamma, widow of the 15th Zamindar, in his place. This was an affront to the *muttadars* and *mokhasadars* of Gudem who were not consulted ... and who protested that they had never before been ruled by a woman... In Rampa, the death of the Mansabdar Ram Bhupati

> Dev in March 1835 was followed by a revolt of *muttadars* against the daughter who had been appointed as the successor (1.102).[10]

She raises a question regarding this kind of division that exists in the subaltern approach to the study of issues be it regarding man-eating goddesses, objects of reverence and generators of solidarity, on the one hand, and secular daughters and widows, unacceptable as leaders, on the other. There are several such instances where the subaltern focus seems to overlook the gender question. She takes another illustration to support her argument, that of the Patidars.

> It was not uncommon for a 'superior' Patidar to spend his dowry money and return his wife to her father so that he could marry for a new dowry. Amongst Patidars, it was considered very shameful to have to take back a daughter [!]... *Gols* were formed to prevent ruinous hypergamous marriages with 'superior' Patidar lineages... Here, therefore, we discover a strong form of subaltern organization within the Patidar caste which provided a check on the power of the Patidar elite... Even Mahatma Gandhi was unable to break the solidarity of the Patidar *gol* of twenty-one villages.[11]

In examining this Gayatri Spivak is unable to understand how this "crucial instrumentality of woman as symbolic object of exchange can be overlooked." "Male subaltern and historian are here united in the common assumption that the procreative sex is a species apart, scarcely if at all to be considered a part of civil society." Further, while exploring the way in which women are left out of the notions of territoriality and of the communal mode of power even though they are the instruments which facilitate the consanguinal or mythic patrilineage she points out how the subaltern historian mentions but does not reflect upon the exclusion of the subaltern as female subject: "In each of these [rebel villages] nearly all the population, barring females acquired by marriage, claimed descent from a common patrilineage, consanguinal or mythical, and regarded themselves as members of the same clan or *gotra*. This belief in a shared ancestry made the village assert itself positively by acting as a solidarity unit and

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[10]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies* IV, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, 357.

[11]Spivak, "Subaltern Studies," 358.

negatively by operating an elaborate code of discrimination against aliens."[12]

Similarly, in the early medieval period in the Deccan and Karnataka, matrimonial alliances were one of the chief means of cementing bonds between kingdoms, especially when the dynasty with which such a relationship was considered very important, and in such cases the name of the woman finds mention. Yet, not many serious studies have been made about this important bond that women facilitated. It is looked at almost entirely from the political importance to the men involved, or in terms of the new kinship ties that were being created through this process. The women themselves were, however, not the subject matter of such a discussion.

Just discussing these few events and the nationalist, Marxist or subaltern historians' neglect of the female subject should give us an idea of the difficulty of writing an Indian history from a feminist perspective. At the same time it reveals the need for analysing and understanding the silence and the omissions of women in all histories. It also reveals the possibilities that are inherently present in these very omissions of rewriting a history of women.

Subaltern history writing in India which is one of the most recent approaches to the study of history itself, as we have seen, possesses another problem in its approach to the female subject. In the words of Kamala Visweswaran, "two distinct problems mark the theorization of gender by the Subaltern Studies group. Either gender is subsumed under the categories of caste and class, or gender is seen to mark a social group apart from other subalterns, (which is symptomatic of the formulation 'women and the subaltern')."[13] Kamala Visweswaran's contention is that while some of them may have looked at how the domesticization of women helped in the formation of the nationalist subjectivity, they do not examine how the women have become a subaltern nor, as a class, how this domesticization has turned out to be a strategy for the containment of

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[12]Spivak, "Subaltern Studies," 359.

[13]Kamala Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its- Historiography," in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, ed., *Subaltern Studies* IX, OUP, 1999, 88.

women's agency. Discussing this particular process she points out that studying nationalist ideology and its critique would necessarily mean that it is the voices of the nationalist middle class or elite subject which is being recovered. She is conscious of the fact that lower class subjects are being displaced.[14]

Examining the colonial and nationalist representations of women in the national movement we can see how women were not seen as having common goals. Rather the women were split up as married women who were considered more respectable, especially if they came from a middle or upper income group, being able to afford servants to carry out the domestic work. Their political motives were, therefore, not suspect. On the other hand, unmarried women, lower-class women or other women who could not establish their respectability might have the label prostitute or paramour attached to them and their political motives became suspect. Their participation in the national movement was seen as an effort to gain respectability. As a result, only the middle-class and elite women were seen as actors in the national movement and the others were left out.[15]

Similarly, as is often done in the present context, to deny women's agency is to attribute their political participation to their husbands' influence and machinations. The possibility of women being their own agents and voicing their own concerns is completely denied. They are only seen as instruments of the men speaking and doing things as they dictated. Through this process, once again, the role of women and their capacity for individual action are refuted, and, therefore, the argument for creating space for women in the political sphere is considered irrelevant if all that women do is to speak on behalf of the men.

It must, however, be pointed out that there is not a complete absence of information regarding women's role in India's past. Even where there is information because of the gaze being focused on other objects such information is neglected. For example, there are quite a few inscriptions and literature which refer to women donors in the land grants of the period 700-1000 A.D. Some of these women were heads of the villages while others (like Amrapalli in the days of the Buddha) were courtesans who had

[14]Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender," 89.

[15]Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender," 89-90.

substantial property, which they bequeathed, to a temple for its maintenance or for worship in the temple. An analysis of the records referring to such a situation together with the records that Gayatri Spivak[16] has referred to negates the proposition that women did not have property or that they had no role in the political system of their day. What we need is an approach that does not gloss over the references to the women in the historical records. Rather, we need a perspective that includes these references in order to analyze the nature of the society and polity of the respective period more holistically.

The Malkapuram Stone Pillar Inscription[17] of the time of Rudramba, dated 1261 A.D., for instance, records that in the Kakatiya dynasty Rudradevi was the ruling queen. She confirmed the rant of the village Mandara in Kandravati in the *vishaya* of Velivada bounded by the Krishnaveni in the north, made by her father, Ganapati, the former ruler to his preceptor. She also made additional grants at this time. This inscription also records grants of land to ten dancing girls and fourteen songstresses besides several men of different occupations and categories. It is also said that the lands so granted are to pass on to the sons of these men on their death and to their wives in the absence of sons. This is a very interesting inscription which brings to light several factors. Firstly, that a daughter of the ruler was the reigning queen and not just a regent for a young prince who had not come of age. The fact that she, indeed, was the reigning queen is gathered from the fact that the grant was issued in her name, confirming a grant that her father had made earlier and making new grants of land to several people associated with the particular gods named in the inscription. Even more interesting is the fact that the dancing girls and songstresses were also granted land through this inscription. Given the status of women and their limited rights to property, even in the twenty-first century India, this information is useful to reconsider the status of women in the early medieval period and also the right to property that widows had.

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[16]Spivak, "Subaltern Studies," 357.

[17]Malkapuram Stone Pillar Inscription of the time of Rudramba, Saka year 1183 (1261 A.D.), no. 15, D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civlization,* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, 574ff.

In addition, a perusal of cases from British period[18] reveal that dancing girls had property that was, later, inherited by the daughters and unmarried sisters who led the life of a *dasi*. The courts held that as per their custom daughters were preferential heirs over the sons. This was a customary practice which the colonial courts recognized, and ruled, therefore, in favour of the dancing girls even though in that period Hindu law did not recognize the right of daughters to inherit the property of their parents. Examining this particular information against the background of the donation of land to dancing girls made in the thirteenth century changes our understanding of the history of, at least, some women in history. Similarly, dancing girls had a right to inheritance which was denied to married women under the Hindu law. The courts recognized this practice as well and decided the cases accordingly.[19] There is need to examine the available sources from a fresh standpoint. Reinterpretation of the existing records can provide a wealth of information regarding women in history when studied from a feminist perspective. We do not even need to unearth new source materials or even new evidence. It is already there; it is only a question of seeing it and weaving it into our analysis of society in the past.

These pieces of evidence from different periods of Indian history and from different regions reveal that the history of women in India cannot be studied as one grand narrative of the history of all women in India. It points to the fact that women whether now or then come from different strata of society and are influenced by their caste, class, marital status, the political and economic power of their families, and, as a result, their individual status varies accordingly. Whereas in most histories of India even when there is some reference made to women's status only the status of women from the upper castes, mainly the brahmana caste is taken into consideration and even reform efforts in the nineteenth century targeted them. Practices like *sati* and ban on widow remarriage were seen as widely prevalent and the bane of Indian society when they were practices restricted to a few castes in some parts of the Indian subcontinent.

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[18]Jaya Madhav Kalavani v. Manjunath Tai Chandu AIR 1916 Bombay 64 (2) Shanmugathammal v. Gomathi Ammal and others in AIR 1935 Madras 58.

[19]Nagamuthu Pillai and another v. Dasi Sundaram AIR 1917 Madras 472 (1).

The effort to reinterpret Indian history from a feminist perspective is hard, but not impossible. We have to acknowledge the existence of various approaches even among the broad category of feminists and realize that any reinterpretation will not be a simple matter. However, such an effort will result in the process of writing into history the accomplishments of women from different sections of society. This will not only enable them to regain their place in society but also make our understanding of society more comprehensive. There, naturally, cannot be one history of India or of women but all the histories together will widen our knowledge and deepen our understanding of Indian history. As it exists now, Indian history is incomplete without these narrations.

History is a discourse, a text that logically makes possible infinite and varying readings. The raw material of history consists of literary and non-literary material which has been read and discussed by using the analytical and methodological tools that historians construct from age to age;[20] for we must remember that history is not the synonym for the past that has already occurred. History is, to a great extent, the reflection of the historian's perspective and since the historian is a part of the society that shapes his thinking and his views, history "is a dialogue not between abstract and isolated individuals, but between the society of today and the society of yesterday."[21] Since this is the nature of history there cannot be one 'true' narrative. No one can uncover the entire past from the perspective of every individual in society. There are, then, inevitably, dominant perspectives of history that gain ground. Given the fact that today more and more women are becoming vocal and adopting the tools of the mainstream society it is inevitable that history will be rewritten from feminist perspectives. It is not only that they will do so but that they should do so in order to make possible a more realistic history that all sections of society can relate to and find it meaningful.

Such efforts have already begun in Indian history writing but there is plenty of room yet to be explored. New technologies and novel methodologies make possible not only availability of new information but also the reinterpretation of already existing data. As many new histories

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[20]Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 9.

[21]Carr, *What is History?* 55.

from feminist perspectives get written they will facilitate the reconstruction of ourselves, individually and socially, helping us chart the course for the future of our society. "To move towards a fairer society in the ideal of full humanity for all, men must be ready to dispense with patriarchy's rigid orthodoxies and life-denying hierarchical systems... All future developments from now on must be assessed from the perspective of both sexes, since both men and women are equally important to the making of history. The hope for the future, like the triumph of the past, lies in the co-operation and complementarity of women and men."[22]

[22]Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, 16.

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REDIRECTING THE HISTORY OF INDIA

Arvind Sharma♦

1. Introduction

This article has its origin in the following trilemma: if you ask a Muslim or a Sikh in India he or she is more likely than not to claim that although the Indian state claims to be a secular state, it is in effect a Hindu state; and if you were to ask a Hindu whether the Indian state is a secular state the likelihood is, an increasing day by day, that he or she would say: it claims to be one but in effect favours the minorities and discriminates against the Hindus. If, however, you asked the members of the legislatures, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary of the Indian state, they would in all likelihood assert that India is a secular state. This adds yet another dimension to the issue. The religious minorities form one horn; the religious majority the second, and the secularists[1] the third horn of this

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[1]It is often claimed by some secularists that they are Hindu but secular, or Muslim but secular, thereby generating the possibility that it is possible to belong to a religion and to be secular at the same time. There is some truth in this claim but it obscures the following major historical development: "If one major strand in the process of secularisation is the religious emphasis on the distinctness of a transcendent God from the world of nature, and a second, the sovereign independence of the same God from all human social institutions, religious as well as political, then a third, of no less importance, is the secularisation of culture through the vindication of the autonomy of reason. Christianity's origins in the Hellenistic world meant that from the first it attempted to interpret its Judaic heritage in the light of Greek philosophy. The secularisation of nature and society already carried the implication that these realities had their own intelligibility. Christianity took the further awesome step of assuming that God also was, at least to some degree, rationally intelligible. For the next thousand years, Christian theology expounded its scriptural base in terms of Platonist-Augustinian, and later Aristotelian, models. In the Aristotelian model developed by Aquinas, it is precisely because they depended on the nature of God that created realities share the intelligibility common to Being. The dignity and role of reason thus received religious legitimation, and in the centuries after the Reformation had both strengthened the this-worldly focus of the Christian calling, and weakened the church's dominance of intellectual life, reason found a voice

dilemma – and, if I may be permitted to mix metaphors – the simultaneous claim by each that its ox is being gored constitutes the trilemma.

If the trilemma has been correctly identified then it demands an explanation. This article is an attempt to offer one such explanation. However, before I proceed any further, I feel duty-bound to identify the limitations to which my analysis is subject:

(1) I am neither a political scientist nor a lawyer by training. Hence, I remain open to correction on matters pertaining to these aspects.

(2) I am an Indologist by background but here again my interests incline more towards Hindu religion and philosophy as distinguished from Hindu law, so here too I remain open to correction.

(3) As all human beings are liable to error, academics not excluded, I remain open to error on account of this human condition, and, therefore, open to correction in this way as well.

2. Classical vs. Modern Indian Models of Secularism

It is my thesis that all the three horns of the trilemma are making a valid point because despite claiming to be a secular state the Indian state has in actual fact (1) functioned more like a classical Hindu state, and (2) unlike a modern secular state.

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independent of theology and gave birth to modern philosophy and science. This secularisation of knowledge in time went far beyond its religious origins. Many modern worldviews deny that religion has any relevance at all in the political, economic and social spheres, or go further to question the existence of God and the validity of all conceptions of religious transcendence. 'Secularism', as it is generally called, constitutes a profound challenge to religion in its entirety. Often, in recent years, the word 'secularisation' has been used to imply the inevitable, and desirable, demise of religion. It should be obvious that in this use, the word has taken on an ideological edge derived from what we have called secularism. In other words, it is a myth embodying the 'interest' of groups (especially intellectuals) who aspire to succeed to the position of cultural authority once held by churches (Michael Mason, "Developing Secularisation Theory" (unpublished paper), 4, presented at the International Conference on Religion, Melbourne, July 12-17, 1992; emphasis added).

Given the pluralism of the Hindu religious tradition and its long and chequered history, it would be misleading to characterize a single model or paradigm as constituting the model of the Hindu state.[2] It is in order to take this into account that I have chosen to characterize the mode I have in mind as the classical one. To be even more precise, by a classical Hindu state I mean the model of a Hindu state which emerges from a study of *Dharmaśāstras* of Manu, Yajñavalkya, etc.[3] Even here internal differences exist but a broad pattern is identifiable.

Four aspects of this classical model are particularly relevant to the present context. (1) That in the matter of conquest of another country, usages of the captured country should be respected (Manu VII. 202-203; Yajñavalkya I. 342-343). (2) That according to this model it is the duty of the Hindu state to ensure that non-Hindus within this state abide by their own separate norms (Yajñavalkya II. 192). (3) That all Hindus are not equal in the eyes of the law: crime and punishment is caste-specific as also occupations. For instance, (a) a Brahmin may not be condemned to death but has to be banished from the kingdom when attracting the death penalty (Manu VIII. 380-381); (b) he pays a lower fine, for instance, for defaming a member of a lower caste (Manu VIII. 267-2268), (c) his priestly vocation is hereditary (Manu X. 1-5), and (4) That when it comes to Dharma, the specific dharmas take precedence over general ones.[4] This point pertains to the distinction between *sādhārana* or *sāmānya* and *viśesa* dharmas, *viśesa*, that is to say, specific to one's *varna* and *aśrama*. The presence of the *sāmānya* or *sādhārana* dharmas is sometimes overlooked. Hence, we will do well to remind ourselves that "Apart from the specific qualities required to be possessed by the members of each of the four *varnas*, all *Dharmaśāstra* works attach the highest importance to certain moral

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[2]See K. P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, Bangalore: Bangalore Printing and Publishing Co., 1967; Bhasker Anand Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1963; Harmut Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989.

[3]These *Smrtis* should be distinguished from the later ones, such as those of Narada, Brhaspati and Katyayana. See Indra Deva and Srirama, "The Articulation of Juridical concepts in later *Smrtis*" in Daya Krishna, ed., *India's Intellectual Traditions*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1987, 63-91.

[4]Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, Vol. II, 504-507.

qualities and enjoining them on all men. Manu X. 63, Yāj. I.222, Gaut.Dh.S. VIII. 23-25, and Matsya 52. 8-10 prescribe for all *varnas* a brief code of morals, such as ahimsa, truthfulness, non-stealing (i.e., no wrongful taking of another's property), purity and restraint of the senses. The Mitāksarā on Yaj. I.22 explains that the word *'sarvesām'* therein states that these moral qualities if practised are the means of Dharma for all men from brāhmanas to cāndālas."[5] These dharmas read like the Hindu version of the preambles to modern constitutions which promise "liberty, equality, fraternity" or life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.[6]

Although the Indian state claims to be a secular state I consider that its actual behaviour conforms remarkably to the model of the classical Hindu state on these points. Let me to illustrate this claim with the help of some examples.

(1) The examples from the history of modern India which come closest to conquest of sorts are the cases of military operation in Kashmir in 1948 when it had to be liberated from foreign occupation and in Bangladesh in 1971 when the country had to be liberated from what was deemed as foreign occupation by the former residents of East Pakistan. In both the cases the laws and usages – Islamic in this case – were preserved. In fact, in the case of Kashmir, such protection is offered by an Article (370) of the Constitution.[7] In the case of Bangladesh it has even been allowed to lapse into an Islamic state after the attempted secular experiment failed. Even during this experiment the local laws and usages were left intact. This may be contrasted with the imposition of a secular constitution on Japan by the USA after its conquest, i.e., the secular usages of the USA were imposed on Japan. This is particularly significant as the framers of the Indian Constitution drew on the secular provision of the American and Australian constitutions in particular in framing the Indian Constitution. Australia imposed the religion of the immigrants on the Aborigines whose local laws and usages were disregarded and have barely

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[5]P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962, Vol. V, Part II, 1637.

[6]They are also remarkably similar to the *yamas* of the Patanjali's *Yogasutras* (II.30), which are also declared to be universal (II. 31).

[7]See Jugmohan, *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1991, 232; also see chapter VI.

and belatedly been legally recognized only in 1991. Until the 1960s the aborigines were not even included in the Australian population census figures, perhaps to bolster the legal fiction that when the British landed in Australia the land was uninhabited.

The Indian state has thus acted in a thoroughly Hindu way in the cases of Kashmir and Bangladesh in contrast to the manner in which other secular countries followed up their conquests.

(2) One may begin by clarifying this point that the Hindu state was to oversee the practice of non-Hindu religions within its border. Thus Yajñavalkya (II. 192) "prescribes that the king should guard against breach the distinctive usages and conventions of guilds (of artisans), of traders, of heretical sects and bands (of soldiers)." The word used for heretical sects is *pāsānda*, which is defined in the commentaries as inclusive of those who reject the authority of the Vedas, such as the Buddhists and the Jainas. There is, however, also some evidence which controverts this point. Thus, Manu IX.225 prescribes that the king should banish heretics, and, according to Yajñavalkya (II.70), a *pakhandi* is not a proper witness. Similarly, Gautama IX. 17 directs a *snātaka* not to converse with *mlecchas* and impure persons. The overall evidence, however, seems to support the view that it was the duty of the Hindu state to protect and even at times to supervise the life-style of the non-Hindus. P. V. Kane upholds the basic point that the usages of heretical sects were to be respected, and handles the evidence to the contrary just cited as follows: "These passages may be explained in various ways. Probably the prescriptions of Gautama and Manu refer to an age when the schism caused by Buddhists and Jainas was not very old and feelings between the followers of the Veda and the heretics ran high. But most of these prescriptions are addressed to the followers of the Veda as individuals. They do not negate the requirements laid down by Nar., Br., and other that the king (though of a different persuasion) was to enforce among heretics their own usages. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that at least from the 4th century A.D. onwards the policy of the state in India was 'to protect all religions, but to interfere with none.'"[8]

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[8]Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol III, 883. Thus "in traditional Brahmanical political thought, cultural pluralism within the state was accepted and

Literary and historical evidence seems to support Kane's view.[9] For instance, in the Sanskrit play, the *Mrcchakatika* of Śudrāka, the Hindu king appoints a former acquaintance turned Buddhist as the head of Buddhist *Vihāras* in his kingdom after the dynastic revolution.[10]

By enacting the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Divorce) Act of 1986 the modern Indian state was, thus, just acting like the classical Hindu state, by providing the Muslims be governed by their own personal law.

(3) The classical Hindu model provides for special privileges for certain *varnas*. The modern Indian state has merely inverted and displaced its application, from the sphere of criminal law to that of education and administration. Now minorities enjoy special privileges under Article 30 of the Constitution denied to the majority. They are the new Brahmans, as it were. Similarly, the educational privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins within Hinduism have now been transferred to the scheduled castes and tribes at an all-Indian level and to the backward classes in several states.

Even the logic underlying the redistribution of privileges is arguably similar. The Brahmins claimed their privileges on the basis of their good karma of the past which caused them to be born as Brahmins. The new privileges are offered to the depressed classes on the basis of their past *karma* – but historical rather than reincarnatory in this case. The privileges are a compensation for karmic inequity suffered by them in the past.

There is, however, a wrinkle involved. In the classical Hindu model an attempt was made to match privileges with responsibilities – thus the Brahmins and kings had to uphold higher moral standards of purity and charity compared to the other varnas (Manu VIII: 336-339). No such

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king was the protector of everybody's dharma; being that was his dharma. Only in very exceptional circumstance, apprehending disorder, might the king have used his authority to abrogate certain customs or usages. Hence the idea of a state religion was not entertained." T. N. Madan, "Secularism in Its Place," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, 4 (November 1987), 752.

[9]See Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. V, Part II, 1011-1015.

[10]Kasinath Pandurang Parab, ed., *The Mrichchhakatika of Sudraka with the Commentary of Prthvidhara*, Bombay: Nirnayasagar Press, 1094, 292.

attempt has been made by the modern Indian state, presumably because the privileges are offered to redress past grievances.

It must be noted in general that although the Constitution proclaims a horizontal concept of equality in the preamble, it sometimes adopts, in fact, a vertical concept of equality. It is useful to distinguish at this point between horizontal and vertical concepts of equality. According to the horizontal concept of equality, all are to be treated on par. According to the vertical concept of equality, all are not treated on par. However, the application of the principle of equality takes the form of matching privileges with responsibilities. Thus, at least in some cases, when the higher castes enjoyed higher privileges, they also had to bear proportionately greater responsibility. The punishment prescribed for theft, for instance, is greater the higher the caste, even though the amount involved is identical.[11] Such a vertical concept of equality has a very Hindu flavour.

It is such a vertical concept of equality which, when operating in the area of privileges, renders a "notwithstanding" clause possible. A Brahmin, thus, could not be executed notwithstanding the fact that he was guilty of a crime requiring execution. Horizontal equality requires that all have equality of opportunity to obtain a particular job but the secular Indian state had to resort to the concept of vertical equality when reservations were introduced for scheduled castes and tribes to redress past wrongs. Hence the "notwithstanding clause," with which the affirmative action had to be protected in the Constitution by the insertion of Article 15 (4) through the first Amendment Act of 1951.[12]

(4) Manu lays down the dharma or duties of the varnas and the āśramas in detail. These many called *viśesadharmas* as they are specific to a varna and āśrama. He also, however, lays down dharma common to all, which he calls *sāmāsika* dharma (Manu X. 62). Although which of these takes precedence over the other is a pint of central and continuing debate in Hindu ethics, the majority view among the exponents of the classical model of the Hindu state seems to have favoured the priority of the *viśesa*

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[11]Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, 107.

[12]See Donald Eugene Smith, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, 117.

dharma over the *sāmānya*[13] of which the following is a commonsensical example: one should abstain from taking life in general, a soldier's specific dharma to fight and kill overrides this general prescription.

In this context the modern Indian state set out to assert the priority of the *sāmānya* dharmas – liberty, equality, fraternity in modern parlance – over the *viśesa* dharmas. The Directive Principle regarding the establishment of a uniform civil code for all Indian citizens is a good example of this point. However, it has gone back on this now and retreated towards preferring *viśesa* over *sāmānya* dharma and in doing so is acting like a Hindu state.

It could be maintained that, at least, in criminal cases equality before the law has been maintained. Surprising as it might appear, even this point can be understood in relation to the modern Indian state in the classical Hindu way. For the effect of British paramountency in India was to reduce all the varnas to the same status – that of slaves or shall we say, Śudras. Mahatma Gandhi explicitly stated: "If I had the power, I should declare that we are all Hindus, all of the same varna."[14] But of which varna? Mahatma Gandhi goes on to say: "Indeed, in my opinion, at the present moment, we are all predominantly shudras, so long as we are serfs (under the British)."[15] Moreover, the Ilbert Bill controversy during the viceroyalty of Lord Ripon (1880-1884) clearly reinforces this point – for the British were not prepared to treat the Indians as their equals in administering the law.[16] After all, even "Manu's philosophy of man and society must be viewed in the context of this tension between equality and hierarchy, equality of some sort among the members of a particular varna even for the purpose of recognizing that they belong to the same varna and

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[13]Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 213.

[14]M. K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1950, 381.

[15]Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, 10.

[16]Percival Spear, ed., *The Oxford History of India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, 689.

hierarchy among the varnas."[17] Like Manu, what the modern Indian state has done is to redefine varnas and *jatis* and their privileges and liabilities.

3. Proximity of Indian State and Hinduism

Not only has the modern Indian state in effect been functioning as a Hindu state, it has clearly not functioned as a secular state in the usual sense of observing a wall of separation between the church and the state; certainly not where Hinduism is concerned. Three such areas may be identified here: (1) Administration of Hindu temples, (2) Hindu personal law, and (3) legislation pertaining to Sati.

Government interference in the administration of Hindu temples is so massive that it was identified years ago by Donald Eugene Smith as a potential threat to Indian secularism. He wrote in 1963: "The second major problem for the secular state is the extensive state interference in Hindu religious institutions. The close supervision or even outright administration of temples and maths was one of the traditional functions of the Hindu state. In independent India there is a clear trend for the state to revert to its former role in temple administration. The trend is justified by pointing to the need for reforms in financial administration which the state alone is equipped to bring about. The state has, thus, become the principal agency of Hindu religious reform. In present-day India there is a strong tendency for the state to do for Hinduism whatever it cannot do for itself because of organizational deficiencies."[18] Smith also explained how such a role of the state might erode secularism: "If the state deals with the religion of a minority, there are definite political checks which will tend to limit the extent of the interference. When Hindu legislators and administrators deal with their own religion, that of the majority, there are no such checks. State interference in Hindu temples has been limited somewhat by the

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[17]A. M. Ghose, "Manu's Conception of Man and Society" in Krishna, *India's Intellectual Traditions*, 558.

[18]Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 496-497; emphasis added. He goes on to say: "In the case of temple administration, there is also a decided tendency for the state to become closely identified with Hinduism through state Hindu religious endowments departments. The distinction between the negative function of regulating temple administration to prevent abuses, which the government is empowered to perform, and the positive promotion of Hindu religion, is either not understood or ignored." Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 497.

judiciary's interpretation of article 26 of the Constitution, but it is still very extensive. What is almost totally lacking is the consideration that the concept of the secular state itself imposes certain definite limitations on the functions of government. Not everything that needs to be done by the state."[19]

As the interference of the Indian government in matters of Hindu personal law is too obvious to require documentation[20] or demonstration I now move to a consideration of the controversial issue of *Sati*.

This point requires extremely careful consideration, as the humanitarian argument against the abolition of Sati is so overwhelming that it might interfere with a rational examination of the issue. Happily the point to be made is quite plain: in abolishing *Sati* and its glorification,[21] clearly the *sādhārana* dharma of *ahimsa* or non-violence was being upheld against the *viśesa* dharma of *himsa* or violence where violence is defined as inclusive of violence directed not only towards other, but also oneself. However, as is well-known, the entire tenor of new-Hinduism has been directed against the practice of Sati. Now is the time to make the crucial point: That the entire general thrust of the neo-Hinduism has been to accord priority to *sādhārana* dharma over *viśesa* dharma. Therefore this move of the government is in keeping with the temper of neo-Hinduism. However, this process of generalization or universalization is confined by the new Indian state to the Hindus, thus, again de-universalising it by not undertaking similar measures for improving the status of women among the non-Hindu religious communities of India. Such a selective secularisation delegitimizes the state's claim of offering secularism as a *sādhārana* dharma over the *viśesa* dharma of the various distinct religions themselves.

Crucial to the appreciation of this point is the realization of the full extent to which reformist neo-Hinduism has moved in the direction according priority to *sādhārana* over *viśesa* dharmas. This is best illustrated by the acceptance of the *Bhāgavadgita* as the Hindu scripture

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[19]Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 497.

[20]Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 497-498.

[21]Sakuntala Narasimhan, *Sati: Widow Burning in India*, New York: Doubleday, 1990, Appendix.

par excellence.[22] Rammohun Roy cited it in support of abolition of Sati;[23] Mahatma Gadhi in support of abolition of untouchability.[24] The modern reading of the text drastically modifies the traditional understanding of *varnasrama* dharma. *Varna* is seen as based on action and not on birth[25] (with the notable exception of Gandhi)[26] and, hence, nothing more than a process of vocational rationalization, while asrama system is virtually dispensed with as the *Gita* is seen as incorporating *nivrtti* in *pravrtti*.[27] Such a generalization of Hinduism goes hand in hand with universalization which views all religions as valid approaches to the divine.[28]

4. Indian Secularism: A Double Betrayal

We are now in a position to offer an explanation for the trilemma identified at the beginning of this paper: that the Indian state claims to be a secular state; but that it is regarded as anything but both by the minorities and the majority community. From the point of view of the minorities the fact that the Hindus constitute a majority in India and their views come to influence if not prevail in several cases such as the question of banning cow-slaughter, the inclusion of Jainas, Buddhists and Sikhs, under the legal category of 'Hindu' for purposes of the Hindu Marriage Act, the performance of Hindu rituals at public ceremonies, etc. The minorities tend to view the Indian state as a Hindu state, or as, at least, dominated by the Hindus.

However, what is really crucial for the continuance of the secular state is how the majority community – the Hindus – view it, for if the Hindus turn against it then it would be hard to retain a democratic system

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[22]K. M. Panikkar, *The Foundations of New India*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963, 36-46.

[23]Arvind Sharma, et al., *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, Chapter 11.

[24]Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, 315-316.

[25]K. M. Panikkar, *Hindu Society at Cross Roads*, New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1961, 40-41.

[26]Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, 370.

[27]M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1949, 51-56.

[28]S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1948.

of government. In this respect the Hindus see themselves as victims of a double betrayal: the Indian state has betrayed both the secular tradition of the west and the reformist thrust of neo-Hinduism, whose congruence had made the establishment of India as a secular state possible in the first place.[29] Moreover, under it, the minorities do enjoy some constitutional rights not available to the majority community.

If, despite this evidence, the Indian state continues to claim that it is secular, then this claim is best understood in terms of Thomas Lukmann's view that secularisation is a kind of a contemporary myth. It is a myth which is "shaped by the need of the intellectuals to give a comprehensive account of the origins and essence of their time, their unique place in history... An account of the emergence of the modern world, which is felt to differ absolutely from what came before it."[30] Thus, India's governing intelligentsia has apparently uncritically appropriated this myth.

5. Resolution of Indian Secularist Trilemma

One may now tackle the more thorny issue of the resolution of this trilemma as distinguished from its explanation. This would require behaviour-modification on the part of all the three parties to the trilemma.

a) The Indian State

The Indian State must endeavour to treat all its citizens on an equal footing. At the moment it is perceived as treating the minorities one way and the majority community in a different way. It will give the right signal in this respect by taking steps towards the formulation of either a uniform civil code or leaving the personal law of every religion untouched – at least, from now on. The former course is preferable to the latter but the latter may be politically more palatable.

b) The Minorities

The minorities should not continue to enjoy more rights than the majority as they do, for instance, under Article 30, this equalization could be

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[29]Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 493-495.

[30]Thomas Luckmann "Theories of Religion and Social Change," *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion* 1 (1977), 17.

achieved in two ways: either by withdrawing the extra rights from the minorities or by extending them to the majority community as well. Again, the former course of action is probably to be preferred but the latter may be politically more feasible.

c) The Majority Community

It is in respect to the majority community that the conclusion I have arrived at surprises me most and may surprise others as well. Surprise is too mild a word for it. it is almost painful and the only comport I can find is in the following words of Walter Bagehot: "One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea." To put it bluntly, it seems to me that the Hindus must ultimately take the maximum share of the blame for the present situation for the following reason. Instead of setting their own house in order themselves, they have used the state as an instrument for doing so – the way many Hindus are not willing to take life themselves but are not averse to enjoying eating meat if the animal has been butchered by someone else. The Indian state has been emboldened by their own delinquency into arrogating powers to itself for initiating religious changes and reforms which the Hindus should have undertaken on their own initiative, and becoming arbitrary and reckless as a result in treating them.

The reason why the Hindus have to rely on the state is because they possess no representative regulatory body of their own to do so. As professor M. N. Srinivas once remarked, Hinduism is acephalus at the top, although polycepholous at lower levels. It must evolve a pan-Indian representative body which can both speak for the Hindus and to the Hindus. The Hindus cannot simultaneously dodge their responsibility in this respect and ask the Indian state to abstain from practicing its pseudo-secularism at their expense.

6. Conclusion

I know this proposal is controversial but, in my judgement, also as inevitable as it is controversial. To conclude in the idiom of the tradition itself: the movement of reform in this respect, of providing Hindus with authoritative spokesperson – set in motion by Adi Sankaracarya by setting

up, according to tradition, the four mathas[31] must now be carried by modern Hindus to its logical conclusion. This forward movement, it can be argued, was arrested by the political subjugation of the Hindus and the consequent struggle for survival. This forward movement, now that Hindus are no longer a subject people, should be resumed, and should culminate in the creation of a single all-India body which could credibly speak for all Hindus, or, at least, a majority of them. I see it as the only way of averting two catastrophes: the Hindus themselves making a grab for the Indian state itself or the Hindus continuing to suffer at the hands of the anti-Hindu character of the present-day psuedo-secularism in India. In fact, the danger of discrimination at the hands of the so-called secularists might even be greater than they suffered under phases of Islamic and Christian hegemony; for, at least, the latter had a religion while the secularists have none[32] and as the *Bhagavadgita* says: any religion is better than no religion.

[31]P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, part II, 906; also see William Cenkner, *A Tradition of Teachers: Sankara and the Jagadgurus Today*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.

[32]Madan, "Secularism in Its Place," 757-758.

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Reflection:

MYTH AND FAITH IN HISTORY

Ignatius Jesudasan♦

Myth is a didactic story, attributing supernatural origin to an individual or collective identity, practice or institution. As such, it is meant to perpetuate and perfect that identity, practice or institution to the full realization and manifestation of its potency. Identity is always social or collective and in contrast to another identity or several other identities. As such, every myth contains and sets in motion a social dynamic from the supernatural origin of the identity to its current or present manifestation, and its further or future shape. In terms of its time frame of past, present and future, this dynamic is historical. As such, it affects and effects or makes a history of the identity, practice or institution in view. This means that the history of the practices, institutions and identities will evolve in relative competition and rivalry to one another, and throughout in the name of the sacred as being in competition with bogus claims of others to the same sacred.

Perhaps we should define here the sacred as that which is absolute and necessary, and which necessarily relativizes everything except itself, but which humans have reduced to the status of a device for turning myth into history and history into myth. They do it by relativizing or secularizing the absolute sacred, and absolutizing the secular or the wholly relative. And how, or with what conceptual tools are they able to do it? These tools are the concepts of the whole and the part, on the one hand, and transcendence and immanence of the sacred, on the other. Wholeness or totality is identified as sacred, absolute and necessary to the understanding of all else as part or the incomplete, which is identified as relative and secular. Transcendence means the non-identity of the whole with the part, and immanence means the identity of the whole with the part. Thus, totality and transcendence are correlative and identical with absoluteness, while part and immanence are relative to the whole or

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totality, without being identical to or with the totality. But traditional or authoritarian religiosity relativizes the sacred absolute or totality by identifying the transcendent solely, wholly, and, therefore, exclusively with its own relativity, which it absolutizes by making itself the whole authority there is or there can be because, it claims, God has given it wholly and solely to it, by identifying Himself wholly and solely with it. This is the mythologization or unilaterally invalid transfer of temporal history on to the realm of eternity and of choiceless divine necessity. Because this religiosity sees God or the transcendent as solely, entirely and exclusively identified with and immanent in itself, it denies the divine necessity and legitimation to any and every other kind of religiosity. It demythologizes and thereby desecrates or de-sacralizes their history by denying divine immanence to them, and reducing them solely to human and secular-temporal efforts, claims or presumptions. This has been the banefully deplorable trend of both Aryan and Semitic religiosity. Demythologizing the other has been the established track record of every system, which sought to sacralize and mythologize itself all the more. It has absorbed or assimilated their myths into its history, and thereby declared other histories bereft of the sacred. This is how the Aryan and the Semitic religions have propagated themselves. And it is because the same tactic is involved in their strategy of self-propagation that the dominant Aryan and the Semitic religions come into collision path among themselves. We shall be able to draw attention to this process in the New Testament *vis-a vis* the Old in appropriate places as we go on with our subject.

As for the making or authorship of myths, it is the perceptively, creatively and poetically endowed individuals in any society, who anonymously formulate them, out of the collective memory of the society's unwritten history. When the history gets to be written, the myths serve not only as the oral tradition of prior or pre-history, but also as the pointers to the direction in which the practice, institution or identity will evolve and, thus, make its further history. So, it is fair to say that history is made with the help of myth. As such, myth is the beginning and prehistory of established societies, institutions and practices. As there is a slant in every myth in favour of one particular practice, institution or identity over another, the history made on the basis of the myth will be slanted in the

same direction as the myth. Thus myth is and has a definitive and determining force on the history as made and as written.

History itself gets written not any time at random, but at a definite stage of a person's, society's or institution's development, when the institution, society or person has won enough self-confidence, public recognition and acceptance as a force to reckon with in the respective sphere of life and action or interaction in the prevalent, dominant identity and institutional system. There are struggles involved in gaining social acceptance and recognition. It is when the struggle has succeeded in winning the public respect and recognition that the struggle itself is recorded as a part of the successful making of history.

So long as the efforts and struggles for winning acceptance and recognition for the identity of a person, group, practice or institution do not attain their goal, that experience is only stored in the emotive memory of the protagonist and the rest of the struggling group. It is committed to writing when the culmination of safe and secure establishment or at least the assurance of it has been reached. The duration of the indecisive struggle would tend to remain clothed in the inner psychic garb of vague and uncertain myth rather than etched on the tapestry of visibly accomplished sacred history. It is the stably instituted establishments, like monarchy, priesthood and schools of prophets, which invite and commission the writing of their successful accomplishments. Myth, by itself, is an emotive psychic record corresponding, volatile and variable with the changing external situation, while historiography is, by and large, an externally objective and verifiable fixed record of a stable state attained by a person, group, practice or institution at any given time.

While these statements or assertions are true of most historic societies, they are particularly true of the Old and New Testament histories. The latter are the historical documents of two distinctly established societies, namely the Jewish and the Christian. But the documents also reflect the stages or phases of the two people's struggles to get themselves established and recognized by others as a force or identity to reckon with. Mythologization has been the process with which these societies have made their respective and competitive histories.

Faith is the history-making virtue or quality of holding on firmly to the myth and its realization, in full readiness to put up with the struggle as long as it lasts. Hence, myth and faith are inseparable from social and even individual history of establishing a distinct identity. Both myth and faith relate the individual or group to a natural and supernatural other that is seen as conferring the distinct identity and calling on the individual or group to prove it in action and passion or suffering for it. Identity is a value for which one is ready and willing to act and to suffer, to do and to die. The perceived source of the identity-conferment is also seen as the energizing power and justifying authority over the action or sacrifice demanded in the challenging historical context. In ancient societies, the perceived source of their identity and its legitimacy was their patriarch, prophet, king, priest or god, or all the five of them together.

In claiming the sacred historical status, the New Testament builds itself on the Old, by treating and taking over Jewish history as the prehistory of Christianity. It roots itself in the myth, which it treats as history, of the call of Abraham, out of his household and country, by the God of heaven and earth, to a land he promised to assign him and his would-be innumerable posterity. It is equally rooted in the myth of the call of Moses on Mount Sinai, by the God of his fathers, to go back to the Pharaoh, to demand from him to let his people go into the desert to worship him. The New Testament closely patterns and parallels Jesus on the pre-historic myths of Abraham and Moses, going into Egypt and returning to the land of Israel, and founding and fashioning a new people or society of the Christian or messianic faith identity, which God is seen as having conferred on Jesus and all his followers. This was, and reflected, the phase when the Christian society had to legitimize itself in the face of the Jewish pre-establishment.

But when once it crossed the threshold of Judaism and reached out to the non-Jewish pagan world, it fell back from Jewish royal messianism to the universal anointing signified by the myth of Adam. In this changed scenario, Jesus, the messianic son of David, turned correspondingly into the suffering, and, eventually, glorified son of man. The gospel of Matthew reflects the Jewish phase of the Christian struggle for identity, while Mark, Luke and John reflect the non-Jewish or 'pagan' phase of the

Church's struggle to establish and win recognition for its distinct social identity.

The struggle for identity always involves conflict, controversy and polemic of a defensive as well as offensive sort. Apologetic is defensive polemic. Question and counter-question are offensive polemic. But it is all legitimized and sublimated in the historical document by mythically incorporating it all as the controversy of its founder of stem-hero. Polemic and apologetic provide a fertile field of mythologisation. This may explain the abundance of myths in the Old and the New Testaments alike. The letters of St. Paul and the book of Revelation abound in defensive myth, while the gospels of Matthew and John abound in offensive myth.

But the basic function of myth, like that of identity itself, is to defend it to the point of establishing it or making it true and come alive. Rituals and sacraments are identity creating, identity-conferring and identity-challenging myths. They continue in symbolic actions what the myths narrate as sacred history of origins of identities.

We generally tend to take, and speak of the gospels, the Acts and the letters and other writings attributed to the apostles, and even the books of the Old Testament, to be truly historical. We acknowledge at once that, strictly speaking, not all the books of the Bible are formal histories, as modern critical historians define history. They are all historical, but not histories the way critical historians define it now. They are histories the way the ancient people saw and received history – facts imaginatively mixed with fiction, or mythologized, exaggerated and super-naturalized with the help of the belief and desire of the authors and their times and contexts, namely to continue and build on what had already been received and initiated. While formally adhering to the characteristic impersonality of narrators of their past times, the authors put themselves and their contemporary historically contextual problems, needs, decisions, deeds, understanding, interpretation and their justification, very much into their past, but informally and indirectly, by placing it all dramatically into the mouth of their heroes or protagonists, about and around whom they wove their collective memories. This was the prophetic and deterministic style and mode of historical narration, which mythically projects or visualizes the future as present, foreseen or pre-determined already in the past.

Such a practice, common to the fatalistic outlook of ancient people and their writings, as well as fiction of all kinds in our own times, makes for absorbingly interesting, and selectively relevant and revealing literature, even if it happens to prejudice one for or against certain stands, understandings and approaches. It appeals to the like-minded or the imaginative and the unimaginative alike in their different moods and states of thought, emotion and experience. In any case, they reveal the authors, their times, concerns and their approach to the needs and problems that they encountered. The question whether their protagonists actually said or did what the authors attributed to them renders their works mythical-historical rather than critically historical.

We are accustomed nowadays to seeing our history under separate heads or classifications such as social, political, economic, cultural, religious and so on. The way we see history reflects the complex nature of our society and of our self-consciousness. It has become so complex, that we are able to grasp it only by compartmentalizing it. We belong to society at so many distinct levels of identity and identification, like gender, age, family, caste, education, occupation, language, region, religion, nationality and what not, that it is indeed difficult simply to unify it all under any single head. We do meet and mingle across the barriers or boundaries of age, gender, caste, race, language, education, status, religion, nationality and politico-economic and cultural systems and ideologies, without wholly being able to integrate it all into or under any one head.

The ancient and biblical worldview was not so complex, because the biblical society was far more isolated from the rest, and almost totally unified within itself, under the aegis or authority of its religious belief and practice. Their religion decided, defined, limited and dictated their identity, education, behaviour, polity, economy, and culture – in fact, everything. Religion and religious leaders or religiously approved leaders wielded almost total or totalitarian power. They decided what was right and wrong, and what was permissible to think, speak or write, even as history.

Biblical and Semitic history was written to preserve the total social identity of the community in that kind of simple-mindedly unified status, wholly under the aegis of religion and the supernatural. Whatever proved helpful to that end was also historical, irrespective of whether it materially

so happened or not, irrespective of whether there were independent or extra-communitarian testimonies to it or not. History was written in order to edify – to build up or preserve the faith-community as it had been and was being shaped. History writings, then, was didactically purposive. It was not undertaken for the sake of, or in the perspective and concern of the critical and scientific historiography of our time and understanding.

The most significant difference between biblical times and our own is with regard to the role of God and religion in the respective societies. God and the supernatural belonged to the primary datum of the ancient and biblical people's self-consciousness. God objectified or made real to the ancient and biblical people the totality of their identity. In the light of the Renaissance exposure of the West to the Greek classics, the Reformation challenge to the old interpretative authority of the papacy over the scriptures, the dawn of the age of reason and modern science, and the formation of the modern Western nation States out of the long unified Holy Roman Empire, made for a challenge to the hold that God and monolithic religion of the Catholic Church had on the thought and behaviour pattern of the Christian West. Nietzsche summarily expressed this challenge or change at his best with his famous phrase of the "death of God" from modern consciousness. If we honestly examine our own consciousness, we should also confess how much of our life is lived in a world wherefrom God died or, at least, is absent since a long time ago. Our becoming rationalistic coincides more and more with our autonomy and responsible freedom from a God, who stands outside and over against us. It is an indirect affirmation of, and demand for a God or the sacred, which is immanent in and nearer to us.

God and the supernatural not being an essential or integral part of our work-a-day self-consciousness, the miracles and supernatural interventions claimed or reported in the New Testament about Jesus, and the wonders of his birth, miracles and resurrection are not as easily credible to our age and contemporaries as they were to the people of a previous generation or to the medieval readers of the New Testament. This is simply a problem of hermeneutics or mode of understanding of the Bible, and not of faith in Christ or the Church. Jesus and his life do not, and would not become less relevant and meaningful to human life and history for not subscribing to the miraculously supernatural interventions attributed to and about him by

the writers of the books of the New Testament. The miraculous or the extraordinary is not the essence or core of the Christian nor of any other faith. Faith is the quality, which sustains life in the humdrum existence, where God seems, as it were, to be absent, as he was when Jesus was hanging on the cross.

This is where faith stands most in need to be alive and enlivened, without the marvelous and the extraordinary interventions from above or from anywhere. But this was not the mode of thought, belief and behaviour of the biblical people or even of the non-Jewish converts to Christianity, for whom most of the New Testament books were written. This is not to say that we are unaffected by experiences of miraculous power that do happen. But reports of events which we have not witnessed at first hand give rise to a search for alternative, rational, scientific and natural explanations, because day-to-day life does not strike us as miraculous. Even if marvels do occur, their impact does not last on the plane of routine life for long. Normal life is one of faith and not of obvious miracles.

As far as our contemporary culture goes, filling the life of Jesus with miracles and extraordinary divine interventions distances him from the rest of us rather than closing the gap between him and us. There is a greater human appeal to our age in an ordinary human being reaching extraordinary heights of favour with God and fellow-humans than in a divinely and virginally begotten child growing to be constituted Son of God at the right hand of the power of God.

What then? Do we, and are we to, dismiss the New Testament or re-write it for our age? There is no hint or suggestion to such an effect here. What is written is, indeed, written. The difference is that what was understandable and sensible to a past age need not be meaningfully intelligible to the modern scientific era, and certainly not on the same terms the past texts and formulas used. There is no suggestion or question here of tampering with texts. They have all to be respected in and with their historicity. Their interpretation and stress have to be different for our contemporaries. Otherwise the course of demand for intellectual sacrifice would only mean loss of more and more people to the Christian faith. We would be making or demanding the sacrifice not for the essential affirmations of the New Testament, which are about and for humans, but the way, style or form of the affirmations. This would expose the failure of

the mechanism of interpretation, bringing more and more disbelief in it than has occurred till now.

The form or style, in which the New Testament makes its dramatic affirmations about Jesus as Christ is mythical. Myth is the induction and assertion of the divine and the supernatural as the agent of a naturally and socially explainable fact or phenomenon. To the extent that the induction denies natural and human cause and effect, it does psychological violence to modern day belief and criteria of credibility, by making faith dependent on an unnatural sacrifice of human intellect. Heaping marvel upon marvel, as a form of hyperbole, is also mythical. The New Testament writers are deeply impressed by Jesus' extraordinary charisma of power in word and deed (Lk 24:19). To impress the readers with it, they heap parable upon parable, discourse upon discourse, and miracle upon miracle. A mere human being could not speak or do as Jesus did. Therefore, his origin, his mission and his life's end had to be divine. The attributed miracles would go to create that faith in those generations, which had not eye-witnessed Jesus for themselves.

Ancient people did not see and understand natural and historical happenings like birth, disease and death, thunderstorm, floods and war with its natural human logic of winners and losers, but in terms of God and his good pleasure or displeasure with the affected person or people. Ours is a scientific mode of individualist perception. Theirs was theologically collective. The scientific mode belongs to our time and its fashion of rational social acceptability. The theological belonged to the fashion or mode of accepted and acceptable rationality of olden times. Therefore, the theological belief and explanation, which came spontaneously to the ancients, seem to our age a folly and a scandal, like *deus ex machina*.

How, then, shall we cope with the genuine and real difficulty, which most of us and our contemporaries feel when faced with the mythical sounding supernatural agencies, messengers and messages, and causes and effects attributed to and with the birth, deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus?

Dismissing and ridiculing them are not acts of intelligent human response. Nor does literal belief prove convincing and conducive to contemporary consciousness and rationality. For, we cannot simply

dismiss and ridicule contemporary perception and rationality either, because it would be irrational, unscientific and anti-intellectual. Is there then a *via media* between dismissal of the literal, and surrender in belief to the supernatural? An analogy might throw light on how we do, can and should go about in this state of dilemma. Fairy tales and myths did not and still do not surprise or shock us as long as the duration of our childhood. But childhood does not last for a whole life. Every child grows into adulthood, old age and death. Still the fascination of fairy tales and myths does not cease. They continue to make an appeal and a sense, though the appeal and the sense of adulthood and old age are not the same as the sense and appeal we experience in our childhood. The child's sense of fairy tale and myth is literal. The child surrenders to myth and fairy tale as if it all happened exactly as the story says, and can still happen and be true in its own life and experience.

This was the state of our ancient adults. They believed the stories literally, questioning and suspecting nothing of the intentions, processes or procedures and interests of the storytellers. They were only involved in the interest the story aroused in them, and not in the interest, which motivated the storyteller to narrate the story the way he did it. This is the major difference between the ancient believers and the believers of the day. The former believed implicitly; they trusted implicitly. We do not, and we cannot. For all that, our stand is neither innocent nor irrational, but critically trusting, and only questioning and selectively believing and interpreting as modern day adults. We interpret fairy tales and myths as poetically imaginative, true at the imaginative level, but not at the literal, factual, and historical.

What becomes then of the supernatural interventions we come across in the gospel narratives? They are the author's inventions and products of his imagination, to convey to the reader, what his own meaning, understanding or interpretation of the event and life of the person that he is speaking about, is. The objective medium of dramatic narrative does not allow him to step into it abruptly obtruding on the narration. It permits him to dramatize or objectify himself into a character or actor in the story, assuming even the role of God, to say what the story of Jesus' life and death means to the reader and to all humankind. It need not be unique. It is typical or typological of the reader's own life – at least, potentially. It is

for the reader to actualize that potentiality. The angelic messengers from God at the crib and at the grave of Jesus, then, are the prophets and evangelists themselves objectified.

It is a matter of fact or material truth that Jesus was acclaimed Messiah or Christ at some point of time. The material truth points to the formal truth as well. The question of the formal truth of the messianic proclamation about Jesus relates to the precise time when he was acclaimed Christ. Was he historically acclaimed Christ already at his birth and before, or at some other point or points of time of his life? Whose acclamation could count as historical? Where does the angelic proclamation come in? Is it historical or mythical?

These questions would and should take us to a close reading, identification and examination of the New Testament texts, which refer to Jesus as Christ. The answer to the questions would also demand a differentiation between and definition of historical claims and mythical acclamations. Passages, which treat the name *Jesus* and the title *Christ* as interchangeable synonyms, and, therefore, take the messianic claim for granted, cannot and should not be treated as proven or established claims. This criterion considerably limits the texts to be identified and selected for examination as acclaiming Jesus' messiahship.

But what criterion could differentiate the historical from the mythical acclamations? Insofar as history is the chain of human actions, passions, beliefs and dreams, all human acclamations about Jesus as Christ, might also be considered historical. Insofar as God and other supernatural beings are not a part of empirically verifiable experience of universal and contemporary consciousness, the messianic or Christological claims about Jesus, attributed to God and other supernatural beings, like angels and devils, should probably be treated as ideological and mythical acclamations.

Every human claim is already an assumption and presupposition of something unproved or un-established as already proven and unquestionable. This does not mean that the claim is, in fact, true and unquestionable. Rather, it means that the circle or group, which upholds this claim, does not deem it necessary to prove it. Its reason: it is already believed and treated as established in the group. But on what ground? This

is what I refer to as mythical. God, an angel or a presumed messenger of God, has revealed, or proclaimed Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah. God and angels themselves are prior claims and presuppositions of the messianic circle. The messianic claim is then secondary to and conditioned by belief in the supernatural intervening directly and recognizably in the historical temporal sphere. The argument is that since God and angels, and their power to intervene in history, are unquestionably accepted, their witness or acclamation of Jesus as Christ is also unquestionable, and to be accepted as such. The argument is logically consistent. The only lacuna is to establish that God and angels did indeed intervene and proclaim Jesus as the Christ or messiah in a way that is beyond question or doubt. This is precisely our problem as moderns and post-moderns, which we cannot help being.

Given this cultural gap between the times of the two Testaments and our own, we have to conclude that what the gospels proclaim and take for granted, are myths intended to make or initiate a different kind of history than the one their audiences were accustomed to earlier. This is not to say that the Jews and the then civilized Greco-Roman people of the times were free from the use of myths. They were using old myths to keep old history going, namely myths of system-maintenance. The gospels and the rest of the New Testament were, and introduced, new myths, in order to usher in a new history of, and for the new believers in Jesus as the Christ. Naturally, these were myths of system-change.

Some of the New Testament authors themselves – Peter and Paul, for instance – have introduced a self-contradictory dichotomy between myth and history, opposing their account of the life and message of Jesus as history, against the pagan myths, which they saw as simply fictitious and imaginatively self-created fables (2 Pet 1:16; 1 Tim 1:4; Tit 1:14). They forgot that they had also introduced mythically self-created elements into their historical narratives, and that their purpose was not simply to stop with a narrative or history of the past, but to make future history based on their narrative. For that projected future, the past that they described was as mythical as any that the Jews and the Gentiles were having recourse to. The difference was that the Jews and Gentiles, as established cultural groups, could only have recourse to myths of system-maintenance, while the Christians, as yet contending for their establishment, necessarily

needed new and apocalyptic myths to win and retain belief in the newly won conviction. Myth and history, then, are not mutually exclusive, but complementary and inter-penetrative conceptual categories. All history is made with the help of myths, whether that history is Christian or other than Christian. Faith, again, is not contrastable to myth and history, they being the vehicle and medium in which faith is lived and culturally expressed. Post-Christians, dismissing the gospels, the New Testament and the Bible in general, as a bundle of myths, are labouring under an anti-intellectual dichotomy, not only between faith and reason, but also between myth and history. They do not recognize how they are making the personal history of their lives with the help of the dreams or myths that drive them onward. If they recognize it, they would also recognize the faith that is at work in the myth that makes history. The New Testament, and all great literature, for that matter, employs the same technique, of myth, to share the living faith, which inaugurates, shapes and sustains a new history.

BOOK REVIEW

William Sweet, *Religious Belief: The Contemporary Debate* (Dharma Endowment Lectures Series No. 6), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages vii+168, ISBN: 81-86861-57-2.

This number of Dharma Endowment Lectures Series, by William Sweet, caters to the rational-religious wonderments and responses of most of today's seriously reflective believers, atheists, philosophers and students of philosophy and religion alike. The pen belongs to a really serious thinker with a wide-ranging academic exposure, teaching experience, solid published works, editorships and associate editorships of, at least, four scholarly journals in philosophy, religion and culture, and editorship of the 20-volume *The Collected Works of Bernard Bosanquet.* His recent works and interests are in human rights, culture, pluralism, metaphysics, science, religion, Husserl, Stein and Maritain.

The work under review (1) surveys contemporary philosophies of religion, (2) questions the "consistent failure to recognize the complexity of religious practice and the point ... of religious belief," (3) identifies the problems involved here as their logical positivist and analytical reductionist stance, and (4) works out a rationally tenable non-reductionist way of discovering the meaning and meaningfulness of religious beliefs as a whole, and, in particular, beyond their apparently cognitive nature. The book is a condensed and well-argued rendering of contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion from the linguistic analytical and religious pluralistic perspective, not from the phenomenological or ontological.

Sweet smoothly steers clear of the logical empiricist anti-religious and/or cognitive religious elements in Flew, Hare, Mitchell, Philips, Plantinga, Nielsen, Hick, and others. Along with Mitchell, Sweet discovers the cognitive content of religious belief. He gives a short but clear evaluation (1) of Hick's principle of "lack of rational doubt" as verification tool for religious beliefs and assertions, (2) of his theory that veracity of these assertions depends on the subject matter and the actions that follow, and (3) of his falsification theory that says that "something can be meaningful, and possibly verifiable, even if not falsifiable" (21).

Of all the Hickian proofs for religious beliefs, the one that most satisfies the anthropomorphist believer (whom *all* these thinkers seem to like most!) seems to be the principle of eschatological verification, whereby one is, at least, hopeful of verification of the very meaning of life at the end times as against the total lack of such hopes in the life of one for whom life has no final ends. The exact reason why *we* say it satisfies mainly the anthropomorphist believer is the following. Eschatological verification for such has to be a specific experience at the end times. But the very question whether there are going to be such cognitively too separable experiences at the end times is itself to be verified eschatologically by the theistically anthropomorphist believer, whereas a panentheist (e.g., St. Paul) would have a widely different experience to expect. Not that he would not expect experiences, but he would have to expect, beyond serialized experiences, a relatively general, wholesome, integral and continuous stream of experience(s) that naturally imply also a related version of the above-mentioned verification.

But if we were to sanctify theistic-anthropomorphic expectations as 'real', as against wide approximations to the holistic, integral and continuous, then we do not do justice even to the very more informed theistic and anthropomorphist tenets of religion on questions such as the nature of God, the nature of time and space at the divine realm, etc. As Sweet himself asks, "How could a finite human being ever confirm belief in the existence of such an infinite being?" (24).

He comes to the question of belief, its meaning and origin through a well-argued trip through but beyond Flew, Plantinga *et al.*, on the one hand, and through the thoughts of Wittgensteinian fideists like D. Z. Philips, on the other— commendably within the limited space of Chapters 1 and 2. The debilitating hunch of Wittgensteinian fideism advocated by D. Z. Philips is found to be the non-recognition of the fact that, although one grows from childhood by just growing into fundamental beliefs, religious beliefs need not be fundamental beliefs, and that these beliefs need not always remain rationally unjustified. Sweet brings this point to the fore and tries to solve it. He argues with them all, that religion has an expressive character and that belief has both internal and external criteria for verity. Thus, he unmasks Philips' view that religious belief is a purely private affair and has no epistemological commonality with rational and

other beliefs, by referring to the origin and development of religious belief from outside of actual persons. In the same vein, he calls for and attempts solutions for the impasse caused by Wittgensteinian fideist "uni-dimensional non-cognitive" and subjectivistic (54) reduction of religious belief. He suggests a way that starts with epistemological, intercultural and interreligious transcendence of cultural relativism and leaves "the world as it is" (chapters 3, 4). We should, therefore, look for the foundations of religious belief "as a whole." Sweet concludes in chapter 3 that just as religious belief has recourse to some foundational truths or beliefs, so, too, do all anti-foundationalists, including Kai Nielsen who vehemently rejects foundationalism and, curiously enough, rests his basic arguments on some foundational criteria of validity!

The first three chapters are really basic to those who would like to get a thorough feel of what is going on in the philosophy of religion. From chapter 4 onwards the discussion gets serious, and their reading will be most rewarding, too. Thus, for example, half the book, say, up to page 88, the reader is being prepared to take a plunge into fundamental questions in religious belief and religious epistemology; and, thereafter, Sweet discusses rational ways of solving basic challenges posed by contemporary critics of religious belief. Although the conclusions of the final chapter allows direct comprehension and makes a satisfactory reading for the initiated, the less initiated student of philosophy of religion would do well to read the whole book for full appreciation and for deriving great profit for his/her intellectual understanding and practice of religious faith and commitment.

Now, to comment on chapters 5 and 6 is to take the freedom also to suggest a few more desiderata to the existing chunk of highly cogent but analytical arguments and conclusions. To make it more useful for the reader, the author could have brought in a few chapters on the thoroughly probabilistic nature of all possible definitions of man's beliefs and of all that man utters in a propositionally descriptive and analytical manner. And treating of the futility of simplistic phenomenology of religion as problem solver would have added to the usefulness of the book. This would have given greater credibility to his arguments in chapters 5 and 6!

After the chapter on Reformed Epistemology, there is a well-deserved room for one on propositional-objective perception and 'theorial'

perception. The latter would bring out ways of forming basic beliefs regarding man, the cosmos and the Divine at the dimension of their ontological interface. As rationally tenable varieties of mysticism (deeply religious faith, experience and expression) would show, this alone is, properly speaking, genuine faith (belief) and genuine perception (experience). In that case, such an additional chapter would have contributed further in settling the issue of propositional beliefs the book very much grapples with. Thus, the paradox of immediately triggered beliefs and "putatively serious" beliefs engendered by "cognitive malfunction" could very well have been shown off or transcended by substitution of the former with an ever more universally and probabilistically sensitive experience as the criterion for formation of "properly basic beliefs" – that result from more and more universally and probabilistically sensitive *states* of mind, life, attitudes and experiences (see the first few sub-sections in chapter 4) within the context of the ultimately relational aspect of "All That Are." This is mystic faith that extends the concept of 'works' into that of the nexus of universal consciousness and universally loving action. This is the most genuine aspect and test case of religious belief not touched upon by the book.

For anyone interested in the rational, linguistic and commitment aspects of religious faith, this book is a necessary reading. Most parts of the chapters, especially of the last two, busy themselves with countering or partially agreeing with what the many contemporary philosophers of religion have suggested. But the reader does also expect a more tenable philosophy of religious faith from the pen of a philosopher with so broad-based a formation and so distinguished a record of well-researched works. So, the final chapter could have been more elaborate. The question of the final object of religious belief in its ontological (not just formal, cognitive and action-related) connection with human life on earth remains to be worked out, based on the ontological and cosmological aspects of the question of God, without which the very elemental issue of the cognitive aspect of all religious faiths remains an enigma.

Now, what has happened is that Flew, Hare, Mitchell, Philips, Plantinga, Nielsen and Hick, like positivist and empiricist thinkers, and Sweet himself, forget the fact that religious belief is based on ontologically formed religious attitudes, which, in turn, is, in fact, based on (1) Reality-

in-total and (2) experiences that purport to generalize Reality-in-total, because religion is based not merely on specific subjectivities but on humans' subjectively objective appropriations of humanity, the cosmos and the Divine (if there is such a pole to Reality). Sweet is busy with the anthropological bases of belief and not that which lies beyond, i.e., not with the ontological structures that cause and justify belief. That is, we need, not merely a linguistic, analytic, pragmatic, phenomenological or hermeneutic philosophy of religion, but an ontological one that subsumes all other points of view. When the engagement of Reality (not merely of the Divine) and the ensuring experience, and consequent religious utterance and action are recognized as fundamental, an ontological philosophy of religion emerges. The commonly alleged absolute difference between (1) emotively positive, cognitively null religious experience, belief, utterance, scriptures and discourse, and (2) cognitively verifiable or falsifiable scientific statements would vanish on the basis of their cosmological and ontological foundations. Infusion of Enlightened Consciousness or Silence and its effect in such thinking becomes necessary. The level of Silence in thought does not mystify but improves the truth probability of religious and scientific utterances under the point of view of Reality-in-total. There results, thus, an ontology of scientific and religious realities, and also of such utterances, wherewith any absolute distinction between the two becomes adumbrated anti-holism.

The thinkers discussed take for granted the phenomenon of belief merely in their observable actuality, but why not consider also its more and more genuine universalistic expressions, wherein philosophically more and more tenable Wisdom (belief) is mixed with Commitment (universally conscious and loving action) wherewith one tends more towards actively religious love? "Philosophically more and more tenable Wisdom" represents not merely religious belief but belief in general, that is at the roots of all cognition and action. Commitment tends to intensify and generalise the intensions of the agent. Here, action follows, which, along with the depth of consciousness and intention, determines the extent of rational tenability of beliefs and religious commitment of persons. Propositions regarding formation of such wisely tendentious actions and the consequent emotive-cognitive states of consciousness, in more and more ideal cases of wisely religious persons, are mainly ontologically analysable propositions. They are linguistically analysable only within the

super-structural framework of ontological synthesis and analysis proper to it! So, we need an ontological science of religion to accomplish this feat.

Sweet and no other thinker that he studies in the book are seen advancing the concept of the religious person's trust in God beyond theoretically anthropomorphic beliefs and truths. Typically, anthropomorphic trust has to be typified as truth in an infinitely and universally active Divine, within infinitely universalistic creation and experience of the cosmos by the Divine and in a finitely universalistic creation and experience of the cosmos by men in communion. Insofar as this is not treated of, Sweet, too, belongs to the same school as his predecessors belong!

He has succeeded in basing beliefs in moral and religious action, sure. However well "belief that" is based in "belief in," and the cognitive aspect is, thus, supplemented with the active side, there still remains the question as to what the generalities are, that express themselves in the religious (cognitive and active) faith of individuals and peoples.

The final chapter is also very helpful for those who contribute to the growth of theology, religious studies, interreligious dialogue, spiritual exercises etc. It discusses also the place of reason in all these – a reason why the final chapter is to be recommended to *Charismatics* as well! As mentioned already, the initiative against religious reductionism that Sweet proposes could have been pushed to its broader conclusions, by including in the complex phenomenon of religious belief, not merely the linguistic, social-contextual, multi-religious and psychological environment of specific religious beliefs and of religious belief "as a whole" but also the strains that ingress into the phenomenon of religious belief from beyond media i.e., from the whole cosmos and from Reality-in-total. This would help produce a cosmology and ontology that support the phenomenon of religion from beyond the purely cognitive and social realms. It would, then, serve sentimentalist and intellectualist perversions of religion to revamp by integration! The final chapter would, then, demand a sequel, a second volume: *The Cosmology and Ontology of Religious Belief: The Contemporary Debate*! If belief is affected by its surroundings, as Sweet admits (130), then why not inquire into what general elements of surroundings ingress into beliefs? Only a study and integration of these elements into religious faith can, in fact, advance the cause of rational

explication of faith in a manner adequate to the phenomenon of religion and life in this universe.

Raphael Neelamkavil

Michael Fallon, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1997, Indian reprint, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation (ATC), 2002, pages 395, ISBN: 81-7086-278-7; ***The Gospel according to Saint Mark***, 1997, Indian reprint, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, pages 293, ISBN: 81-7086-279-5; ***The Gospel according to Saint Luke***, 1997, Indian reprint, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, pages 375, ISBN: 81-7086-280-9; ***The Gospel according to Saint John***, 1998, Indian reprint, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, pages 386, ISBN: 81-7086-281-7.

The author is well known in Australia, Israel, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand through his lectures and writings on Sacred Scripture. He has made significant contributions to biblical literacy not only in these countries but in other countries, too. These "*Introductory*" commentaries on the four Gospels are a completely revised and enlarged edition of his earlier one volume commentary on the four Gospels, *The Four Gospels: An Introductory Commentary*, which was published first in Australia in 1980, and then in the USA.

The Christian readers of India are really privileged to have access to the low priced Indian reprints of these four volumes on the Gospels. Unlike the other commentaries, these volumes give the full Gospel text in the narrow column of each page and the commentary part in the wider column. Where the commentary extends beyond the page on which the text is given, the following pages are given over to the commentary. This arrangement helps the reader to refer the text and commentary simultaneously. Another advantage of this commentary is that if a particular text has parallels in other Gospels, those references are given underneath the text-column. An important characteristic of this commentary series is that the author has *italicized* the word(s), phrase(s),

or passage(s), which are unique to one particular Gospel, and which have no parallels in other Gospels. This is a great hermeneutical help to the reader to understand the theological nuances of the Evangelists, especially of Matthew and Luke, by observing how they amend, omit, or rearrange the Marcan text, which is generally accepted by biblical scholars as the first Gospel to be written down. The biblical text that this series has taken is from *The New Revised Standard Version.*

Since the author wants that each of the four volumes is to "be complete on its own," the reader may find that the commentary given on certain texts in one Gospel is repeated, often verbatim, in the parallel texts in other Synoptic Gospels, which the author himself has acknowledged in the Preface. This desire to see each volume complete on its own might have motivated the author to repeat the same topic "Introducing the Gospels," running to 15 pages, in all the four volumes at the very beginning. This introductory chapter certainly provides the ordinary reader with some hermeneutical clues as to how the Gospels are to be approached critically and scientifically. Then the author introduces each Evangelist, his characteristic approach to Jesus, the main character of the Gospel story, and his own theological perspectives. It is noteworthy that the author gives an elaborate and scientific introduction to *the Gospel according to Saint John*, highlighting the theological richness of the Gospel. In each Gospel an elaborate structure is given. Each major section of the Gospel begins with a short introductory comment, which situates that section in the context of the preceding section, and this helps the reader to follow the thread of the story easily. In view of those who are using this commentary series to prepare liturgical celebrations, the author has also given an appendix in each volume listing the Gospel passages in the lectionary.

These commentaries in the series are very useful for those who are "interested in a prayerful reading and reflection" of the Gospels. **Matthew** presents Jesus as the promised Messiah in whom all the Old Testament prophecies find their perfect fulfilment. The Evangelist gives more emphasis to the teaching of Jesus. This is why we find five long discourses in the Gospel: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the Mission discourse (chapter 10), the Parable discourse (chapter 13), the Community discourse (chapter 18), and the Eschatological discourse

(chapters 24-25). These speeches give us "many insights into the mind and heart of Jesus, and also into what it means to be Jesus' disciple." According to the majority opinion of scholars, **Mark**'s is the earliest of the four Gospels. In comparison with Matthew and Luke, Mark gives more emphasis to the deeds of Jesus; that is why we find 18 miracles narrated in this shortest of all the Gospels. Since Mark has written his Gospel to the persecuted Christians of Rome, and since he wants to encourage those in their sufferings, he presents Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who also has undergone similar sufferings, like persecution, misunderstanding, even from his own disciples, and, finally, martyrdom at the hands of the Jewish authorities. According to Mark, any understanding of Jesus that does not take into account the reality of the cross is in the end a false understanding of his person. "The message of Jesus' love, given so unforgettably on the cross, could inspire Jesus' disciples to continue to live as Jesus had lived." The author of the third Gospel is **Luke** who is generally understood by scholars as a Gentile convert from Antioch of Syria. He is a sensitive observer of the events he describes. He is interested in both history and theology. He is not only a most gifted writer but also a man of great sensibility. His sensibility could very well be seen in his treatment of the disciples and the women characters of the Gospel. A particularly prominent emphasis in Luke's Gospel is his conviction that God feels strong compassion for the poor and the marginalized. The tax collectors and sinners, the poor and the oppressed, the sick and the socially marginalized, especially women are present and interact with Jesus more prominently in this Gospel than in any other. More than any other Gospel, Luke gives great importance to prayer and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit both in the life of Jesus and in the life of his disciples. "On every step of his journey, Jesus is responding to the powerful and personal influence of God's Spirit." When we move from the Synoptic Gospels to the Gospel of **John** we feel that we are in a different world where we are given a new and deeper vision of the person of Christ. The words used in the Gospel of John are very simple, every day words like life, light, way, truth, bread, vine, branch, water, shepherd, Spirit and the verbs of action like see, know, believe, come, remain, witness, etc., although the scholars have not yet succeeded in fathoming their depths. To penetrate the depth of John's thought we require great spiritual openness. Like an eagle, John, the great theologian of the Church, has the most penetrating gaze into the mystery of God-made-man. Reading this Gospel means "flying high." The

author of the Fourth Gospel is not literally dependent on the other Gospels and he is more interested in symbolic and theological meaning than in a historical narrative. The fourth Evangelist is "a poet in that he creates speeches and perhaps also situations in order to bring out the significance of Jesus... He is expressing what he has learned about Jesus in a symbolic and dramatic way for he wants to bring out the significance of the real Jesus."

As the reader enters into the commentary part of each volume he will realize that the author has taken every effort to bring out the message of each Gospel more powerfully and effectively by quoting relevant passages from the OT books and the NT books and sometimes even from Rabbinic literature. One negative element that is seen in the commentaries is that when parallel passages are commented in different Gospels, often the same commentary part is repeated. This, however, could have been avoided, to a certain extent, by showing the editorial activity of Matthew and Luke over Mark and bringing out the particular theological nuance of Matthew or Luke by asking and analyzing the question why they changed, at least, some of the term(s) or phrase(s) from their sources. For example, both Mark and Luke report the episode of the strange Exorcist (Mk 9:38-41 and Lk 9:49-50). Luke, in his version, has omitted a clause from Mk 9:39 and more importantly changed the first person plural, "*us*," in Mk 9:40 ("whoever is not against *us* is for *us*") into "*you*" in Lk 9:50 ("whoever is not against *you* is for *you*"). This change may be deliberate on the part of Luke and is very significant. The change of the pronoun from "*us*" to "*you*," may indicate that the man might have had some kind of relationship to Jesus of which the disciples were unaware. Hence, we could presume that the man was a believer in Jesus Christ, but he was not one of the exclusive company of the Twelve, because "he does not follow with us" (Lk 9:49). Nevertheless he acted in Jesus' name and had done what the disciples had not been able to do (see Lk 9:40). Jesus tells John and the other disciples that they are no exclusive group with a monopoly on the power to exorcise; the power which they have (see 9:1) has been given to them as a gift, and they should rejoice at the fact that God can make use of any instrument at his disposal, and not the authorized ones only. The work of God is not restricted to their circle alone. The exorcist who is a stranger to the disciples is no stranger to God!

A second observation is that in some Gospel passages the explanation given is very inadequate, for example, the parable of "the workers in the vineyard" given in Mt 20:1-16. More than half of the space given for the "commentary" the author fills with thematic references that have no direct relevance to the parable, references from the parables of the sower, and the net, and from the episode on the rich young man, etc. This is an interesting parable, the message of which partly depends on how we interpret the meaning of the word "*idle*" that is used in reference to the second and fourth group of the workers about whom it is said that "they were standing *idle* in the market place" (Mt 20:3; see also 20:6). In almost all the English translations the word *idle* is repeatedly used. But this is a wrong translation, because the corresponding Greek word employed here is *argos*, which is a combination of *a* + *ergon*, which literally means "without work" or "unemployed." This meaning is corroborated from the fact that the labourers are presented as *standing* and not *sitting*, which can be a sign of idleness. They are standing there "without work" with the firm expectation that some landowner(s) would come there and call them for work in their fields. This is implied in the answer given by the last group of workers to the question put by the landowner of the parable, "Why are you standing here idle all day? They answered him, *Because no one has hired us*" (Mt 20:6-7). Their answer very clearly indicates that these workers were standing in the market place "unemployed" all the time relying on the mercy of the landowner(s) in calling them for work. This is the reason why the landowner of the parable tells the second group of workers: "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you *whatever is right*" (Mt 20:4). What we see in this parable is a description of the gracious character of God. "*Whatever is right*" before God is quite different from "*whatever is right*" before humans. In other words, God's justice is different from human justice. God's justice is wedded to love and mercy (Hos 2:19). God's justice is not to be limited by human conception of a strict mathematical judgement where reward is in exact proportion to merit. In verse 15, we see clearly the criterion that God uses in executing his justice: not what the law of justice requires, but what the human being needs.

These are some of the critical observations. However, the author of the four volumes in this series has put high scholarship in writing these commentaries. For some passages, such as "Jesus' Baptism" (Mk 1:9-11),

"the Beatitudes" (Mt 5:3-12), "the Sabbath violation of the disciples" (Mk 2:23-28), "the third passion prediction" (Mk 10:32-34), etc., the author has given detailed interpretation shedding more light on the respective themes and this will help the reader to reflect more deeply on the subject. These commentaries on the four Gospels are highly recommended to the preachers of the Word of God and to all those who want to understand the message of the Gospels in a better and deeper way, and live it out in a meaningful manner in their daily lives.

Paul Savio Pudussery

George Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition: A Study of the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Common Christological Declaration of 1994*, Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2003, pages xiii + 213, ISBN: 81-88065-02-1.

This is a publication of the doctoral dissertation of George Thumpanirappel which was defended at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome.

This volume is a bold and solid step forward towards ecumenism. As the author rightly indicates in the very title of the book, it is a study on the Christology of Assyrian Church of the East and the Common Christological Declaration signed on 11 November 1994 at the Vatican by Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV.

On the day of Common Christological Declaration, the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV made a historical confession, "Today the time has come to bring down the walls, which have separated us and kept us apart for fifteen centuries." In his turn, Pope John Paul II informed and instructed the faithful regarding the same Declaration: "Today we share the joy of recognizing that our faith in Christ, true God and true man, is one, and equally great is our love for Mary, his most holy Mother." So strong is the bond between Christians and the yearning for unity. This is the underlining aspiration with which the author is preoccupied in this volume.

Mar George Punnakottil, the Bishop of Kothamangalam has rightly and fittingly observed in the Foreword that the work of Thumpanirappel is "contextual and relevant to the ecumenical endeavours of the Church, especially the Indian Church."

The book comprises of four chapters along with a general introduction and an evaluation and conclusion. This volume provides two important documents of joint declarations in the appendix, which are of immense value. The elaborate bibliography and the short index given in the book serve the reader in further research and reflection.

In the first chapter an attempt is made to understand the historical background of the Church of the East along with its Christological confessions and confusions. In the light of the study, the author argues: "The Christological faith of the Church of the East always remained that of the Apostles and the Church Universal" (37).

The second chapter is a discussion on the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East. In this chapter the author exposes and examines the Christological clarifications of Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius of Constantinople and Babai the Great. There is also a section devoted to the synodal decisions of the Church of the East, where the author studies ten such synods. Another interesting area of research undertaken in this chapter is the liturgical prayers of the Church. The author concludes saying, "When we go through the liturgical prayers of the Assyrian Church of the East one thing is certain: there is no heresy involved in them. We cannot find any Nestorian heresy in the prayers of this Church" (92). Yet another investigation done in this chapter is the Mariology of the Church of the East. Regarding the century long controversy between the preferential use of terms '*Theotokos*' by the Greco-Roman Church and '*Christotokos*' by the Church of the East, the author concludes that it "was really an ecclesio-political dispute between the Sees of Alexandria and Constantinople, played out at the Council of Ephesus" (93). Concerning the conflicting views on Christology perpetuated by the schools of Antioch and Alexandria, the author prefers to walk on the ecumenical path and suggests that "it is best to see them as complementary to each other" (97).

Inter-Church relation among the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is the topic of the third chapter. The author surveys the ecumenical thrust of the Churches, for he considers ecumenism "to be more essential than before." There is a humble submission of the author that the Roman Catholic "involvement in ecumenism is recent" (99). Some of the basic principles for ecumenism are highlighted in the thesis, of course, in the light of the documents of the Churches, which may be of lasting value in the pursuit of Church unity. The study points out that "there is no longer a great deal of doctrinal disagreements existing between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches as a whole" (131). Hence, the author concludes that what is of paramount importance is "a practical application of the Second Vatican Council" (131).

The fourth chapter is on the "Common Christological Declaration" between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Pope John Paul II, while introducing Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV to the general audience, made the following remark regarding the Common Christological Declaration: "This will bring to an end after more than fifteen centuries the misunderstandings concerning our faith in Christ, true God and true man, born of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit" (133). The Common Christological Declaration, according to the author, "has paved the way for understanding among all Churches" (166).

As a conclusion the author points out that there is "no liturgical or canonical text in the Assyrian Church of the East where it says the Christ is two persons" (172). In the opinion of the author, "The Common Christological Declaration rediscovered what already unites the Catholic and the Assyrians Churches" (172). Thus, he reiterates the relevance of the theology of ecumenism for our times, which is "a theology of discovery or rediscovery" (133).

George Thumpanirappel, an oriental Catholic belonging to the Thomas Christians of India, through his study on *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition* has sketched an outline for ecumenism through the rediscovery of the doctrine of genuine faith in Christ and promoted an ecumenical tradition in the Church. The thesis is very relevant and urgent, for the author passionately and scholarly argues that ecumenism is the need of the hour and, as I understand, the underlying force and focus of this work is the common fundamental belief in Christ: "We are one in Christ."

The author through the present volume has made an admirable contribution to ecumenism in the Church, which deserves recognition and positive response. It may be of great interest to those who are involved in the restoration and reform of the apostolic Church of the Thomas Christians of India. This is a wellspring to a student of Christology; it is a source of inspiration for a student of ecumenism; it is an initiation into the learning of East Syriac tradition; and it is an attempt to theologise in the context of the celebration of the Church, both in the light of the Synodal and Liturgical celebration of the East Syrian Church.

Paulachan Kochappilly

Francis Kanichikattil, ***Divine Liturgy in the Vision of Narsai,*** Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages 126, ISBN: 81-86861-49-1.

The book is a souvenir of the silver jubilee of the author's priestly ordination. In this context the liturgical vision of Narsai is significant since he was one of the first to shift the focus of theology from the Bible and speculative rational thinking of a meditative understanding of what the believers celebrate in the Divine Liturgy. The early theology of the East Syrian fathers like Aphrahaat, the Persian Sage and St. Ephrem concentrated on the interpretation of the Bible taking both the Old and New Testaments as a single and consistent book, containing the self-disclosure of God to humanity, carefully avoiding all reference to Greek philosophy. Byzantine fathers like Basil, the Gregories, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Damascene made free use of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy to make Christian faith intelligible to the sophisticated people of their times. But this effort to squeeze a faith bore in the Judeo-Palestinian context into the straight jacket of Greek cultural thinking raised many problems of faith, which had to be dealt with in several ecumenical councils. Narsai who belonged to the church of Antioch and the Byzantine theological thinking, came to the East Syrian Church and assumed an active role in the theological school of Edessa. After he had spent some twenty years there, Edessa, which was within the

Roman Empire and provided imperial protection to Christian faith fell into the hands of Persians, and the East Syrians had to shift their school of theology to Nisibis within the Byzantine borders. To this new school of theology Narsai came with the confidence of a superior church to introduce a reformist programme into a more primitive and less developed Persian Church.

Narsai was a theologian with a concern for order and discipline, an effective preacher and a prolific writer to whom some 360 works are attributed. Kanichikattil focuses his study on Homily 17, which though attributed by some to other authors, is truly representative of the theology of Narsai. The first chapter of the book gives a general explanation of the creative work of Narsai, the second an exposition of his discussion on the pre-anaphoral part of the Liturgy, the third about his interpretation of the various details of the Anaphora, and the fourth about communion. The fifth chapter of the book is an evaluation of Narsai and the sixth a discussion of his relevance to the Church today.

Brought up in the Antiochean tradition Narsai identified himself with the Greek thinking of Theodore of Mopsuestia, his predecessor in the Episcopal office, Deodores of Tarsus and others. Their intention was to make the faith and liturgy of the Church intelligible and acceptable to the sophisticated people conversant with Greek philosophical thinking. One of the crucial points here was the idea of image, which for the Persians meant true likeness and to the Greeks a mere symbol. Hence, while for the former the image by its nature tended to the fullness of likeness, for the latter it could never attain full likeness. So man was created in the image of god only in the figurative sense, namely as having dominion over the creatures of the earth, sharing in certain powers of God, the supreme object he points to and manifesting his royal authority. Adam was not a true image of God, while Jesus, the Messiah was the highest point of that likeness and the 'Son', not in any real and ontological sense but as the temple in which the Word of God dwelt. Narsai was probably the initiator of Nestorian thinking in the East Syrian Church.

Narsai's liturgical interpretation shows the two-tiered world of Platonism: On the one had, the liturgy is a symbolic presentation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and, on the other, also the actualisation of his sacrifice on the altar. When the deacons carry the gifts

to the altar they are said to picture the carrying of Jesus' body to the tomb, represented by the altar; it is followed at the *bema* the "*onitha d'rase*" which is a joyous celebration of the resurrection. On the other hand, Narsai interprets every details of the *Anaphora* to have an effective role in making present on the altar the reality of Calvary. He includes the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist with an effective role in making present the sacrifice of Christ, though the narrative did not have a place in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari. *Epiclesis* invoking the Holy Spirit transforms bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood. In Narsai's perspective, Eucharist is very much what the duly ordained ministers do at the altar, and the people are mostly passive participants. Eucharist is the mystery celebrated by the priests in the secrecy of the sanctuary away from the maddening crowd out in the world. There is a sharp distinction between the *bema* at the middle of the church, symbol of the earthly Jerusalem where readings and instructions take place, and the *madbeha,* the sanctuary, behind the veil at the eastern end, symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem. Into this "Holy of Holies," away from the unholy gaze of the people, only the priests go after the preparatory part at the bema, reciting the Creed. The people are bystanders waiting outside listening to what is being celebrated behind the veil. Narsai seems to indicate the historical beginning also of the sharp separation at the Anaphora of the Liturgy between the faithful, on the one hand, and the non-baptized and the non-absolved penitents, on the other. In the text of the liturgy commented upon by Narsai, the Deacon in three commands sends out the non-baptized, the non-absolved penitents and those who are prohibited to receive communion, while the text of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai's predecessor contains no such dismissal, and some time later such offensive dismissals came to be interpreted in a purely symbolic sense.

Kanichikattil present a detailed description of the contribution of Narsai to the East Syrian liturgical tradition. Though three is little that is original in his thinking, as a prolific writer and a strong administrator, he managed to bring order and discipline to East Syrian liturgical and theological thinking, though it was by imposing on it the rigid framework of Byzantine thought. As the author points out, what Narsai tried to emphasize was that liturgy should not be stuck in a dead past, but should respond to the way of thinking of the people of the times and their actual concerns. After all, Divine Liturgy is not a repetition of what happened

centuries ago in Palestine, but a "memorial," making available to the present Church what Jesus enacted and entrusted to the Disciples: "Do this in memory of me." At the same time, as remaining faithful to the life and sacrifice of Jesus, it has to be a celebration of people today, according to their way of understanding and expression their faith.

The last two chapters of the book present a critical evaluation of Narsai's contribution and his relevance for our times. Kanichikattil pointedly remarks that those leaders of the Syro-Malabar Church who try to put the clock back and restore the early Chaldean tradition as the only authentic one have a lot to learn from the creative work of Narsai. The book is a good introduction for the study of the development of the Chaldean liturgical tradition under the Byzantine influence.

John B. Chethimattam

Thomas Anikuzhikattil, *Jesus Christ the Saviour: Soteriology According to East Syriac Tradition*, Satna: Ephrem Publications, 2002, pages ix + 392, ISBN: 81-88065-01-3.

The above work is the author's doctoral dissertation defended at the Paurastya Vidyapitham, Vadavathoor (Kottayam). It is a biblico-theological study of the East Syriac Soteriology in the light of the Gospel according to Matthew and the Acts of Judas Thomas with special reference to Mar Thoma Nazrani Traditions. The author brings out here "some important aspects of Christian Soteriology or Soteriological Christology."

The book is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is on the Distinctive Soteriological Traits in the Gospel according to Matthew. This chapter is further subdivided into four major sections. The second and third sections are devoted to the Mission of Jesus as parts One and Two, respectively, and they occupy the bulk of the chapter. The former part deals with Jesus as Saviour in his words and deeds, while the latter part is about Jesus, Saviour in his Suffering, Death and Resurrection. Chapter Two deals with the Soteriological Motives in the *Acts of Judas Thomas.* The section II of this chapter is titled "The Acts of Judas Thomas, the Icon

of Syriac Soteriology" and is an elaborate treatment of the Syriac Soteriology in almost all its various aspects and with ample references to Syriac Patrology. The section runs from page 158 to page 239 and is the most interesting part of the work. An equally interesting and important part related to this theme is from page 268 to page 316 that forms a section of Chapter Three, which is a comparative study of the soteriological elements in both the sources. In these two sections we have an extensive study of the various soteriological functions and titles of Jesus as well as a detailed discussion of the meaning of salvation. There is also a systematic presentation of the soteriology of the Syriac Fathers in a separate sub-section. The theme of the final chapter is the Celebration of Syriac Soteriology in Mar Thoma Nazrani Tradition. The author deals here with the significance of the liturgical space-time, Liturgy of the Hours, the sacraments and the Feasts of St Thomas. The book contains a good bibliography and an index.

The book contains several biblical insights useful for the proper understanding of the soteriological themes we daily come across in theology and liturgy. The special contribution of the author is that he has successfully brought out the Oriental Syriac Christian roots that are often overlooked in studies and discussions related to Christian tradition. The author reminds and convinces us that besides the Greek and Latin traditions there is also a Syriac Christian heritage that is equally rich and deep. The work with an elaborate section on the celebration of Syriac Soteriology in Mar Thoma Nazrani Tradition excellently illustrates the truth of the Eastern principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* at the living example of the liturgical celebration of the Apostolic Church in India, one of the most flourishing and vibrant churches of the Oriental tradition. This, indeed, is an edification of this Church and enlightenment for its members. The book provides a comprehensive study and can serve as a very good reference work in Syriac Soteriology that can be highly recommended to students and scholars of Eastern theology, especially of the East Syriac tradition. The author deserves thanks and congratulations.

Sebastian Athappilly

George Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syrian Tradition,* Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2003, pages xiii + 213.

For about fifteen centuries the ancient Church of the East, the Assyrian Church was wrongly and unjustly branded as a heretic Church professing the tenets of Nestorianism, a term standing for the duality in Christ, which Nestorius himself denied as he was convinced of and taught the oneness of the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. This research by Thumpanirappel, makes a systematic study of the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East and "the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East." Though the book is titled "Christ in the East Syrian Tradition," it contains a concise and harmonious blending of Church history, Christology, Mariology, and Ecumenism from the East Syrian perspective which is based on apostolic, biblical, and patristic teachings, liturgical sources and synodal documents, and, therefore, very much Catholic and untainted with any tint of heretical or schismatic stains. The separation of the Church from the mainstream was political rather than doctrinal, and, therefore, an implicit oneness of faith was always there among the Churches from the very beginning.

The author presents the result of his research in four chapters with an Evaluation and Conclusion. The first chapter surveys succinctly the history of all Churches of the East Syriac Tradition – the historical vicissitudes of the Churches of Edessa, the Church of Persia, the Church of Mesopotamia, and the Church of India. Unfolding the historical background the author argues and proves that the Church of the East never, in its Christological faith, deviated from the teachings of the apostle and it agreed basically with the first four ancient ecumenical councils. The second chapter analyses the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East. Certain Christological tendencies such as Arianism and Apollianarianism prior to the condemnation of Nestorianism are also explained here. Then the Christological position of Diodore, Theodore and Babai, the Synodal decisions of the Church of the East and the liturgical prayers are explicated. A few significant Syrian theological terms which were mainly the cause of misunderstanding by the Alexandrians are also clarified adding a very important note from Stirnemann that instead of

reinterpreting the terminology and expressions of the remote fifth century it is essential to redefine the mystery of our faith in terms of the concept of contemporary philosophy and theology and use of modern language. "The Common Christological Declaration (CCD) between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East" signed by his Holiness Pope John Pall II and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch and the "Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church," added in the appendices, could be viewed in this spirit. When Cyril of Alexandria stood for the use of "Theotokos" (Mother of God) Nestorius preferred "Christotokos" (Mother of Christ), which was biblical in content, and avoided ambiguity. It was not a denial of the divinity of Christ, since blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ who is truly God and truly man. The author is of the opinion that in analyzing the Christology of a church, one should depend not on what others say about it, but on what the official documents and prayer formulations of that church state. So he makes in this chapter a survey of the main writers and the liturgical sources of this church to expose the untarnished Christology of the Church of the East. Then he comes to the right conclusion that, instead of considering the Schools of Antioch and Alexandria as holding opposite views on Christology, it is best to see them as complementary to each other. Chapter three describes the ecumenical trends in the post Vatican Council II period and redefines the modern concept of ecumenism which is not a return, but a common journey, whose goal is a communion of Churches as a unity in reconciled diversity. This definition of Ecumenism need not be looked upon with suspicion from the traditional Catholic viewpoint. This chapter makes an observation of the inter-Church relations of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches also in the post-Vatican II era. The Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius I was a land-mark in the history of ecumenical enterprise. They came to the conclusion that the faith and the Christological doctrine of their two Churches differed only in terminology but in content and substance it is the same. The last and the fourth chapter makes a study of the common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The rediscovery and an unbiased examination of the "Bazar of Heracleides" of Nestorius revealed that Nestorius himself was not a Nestorian"! The Common Christological Declaration is one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century as it paved the way for the

resolution of the division in Christendom that had existed for 15 centuries. The author shows how the Common Declaration affects the St. Thomas Christians in India who share the same faith of the East and whose forefathers were once unjustly condemned as Nestorians or Heretics. The Common Christological Declaration acknowledges the legitimacy of calling the Blessed Virgin Mary both "Mother of God" and "Mother of Christ" as the Churches in question accept the divine and human natures in Christ: One person in two natures. The author also cautions that there are some, forming only a minority, in the Assyrian Church who consider the CCD as just the first among many stage, in an effort to absorb the Assyrians and their church into Catholicism.

In the Evaluation and Conclusion the author says that it was due to political reasons that these churches had separated themselves form the Roman mainstream, and, hence, there existed no schism at all. According to the so-called Nestorianism, there are two persons in Christ, a doctrine which was neither held nor taught by Nestorius, and Nestorius as a heretic was a wrong picture presented to the world by sources hostile to him.

It must be observed that repetitions in this book account almost to tautology; a careful manuscript reading should have avoided many errors in spelling; at least one conspicuous instance is a subsection where the content does not go with the subtitle itself, "Christological position of the Assyrian Church during the History" (page 35). However, this study is, as Mar George Punnakottil, Bishop of Kothamangalam, in his Foreword says: "Contextual, Oriented to further dialogue and it will remain treasured piece of reference in theological circles."

Isaac Arickappillil

Asghar Ali Engineer, *A Modern Approach to Islam*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages 152, ISBN: 81-86861-52-1.

The book is a useful contribution to the debate that surrounds Islam and the Muslims in these troubled times. In the author's words it is "an attempt to re-read and re-interpret Islamic sources in their original spirit." It looks

at the need for Muslims to imbibe the "higher Islamic morality" which the Sufis did, endearing them to the masses in India. The restraint and 'pacifist' struggle was instrumental in spreading Islam. The author passionately calls for peace: "Peace in Islam is more fundamental than Jihad." Not violence but "a passionate commitment to justice and peace is real submission to Allah." There is immense potential in the Muslim world and Muslims are urged to reflect on and realize the "multi-layered concept" of Jihad in Islam – Jihad as a means of fulfilling the human promise through inner struggle. The author delves into the causes of fundamentalism, in general, and the social, political and economic struggles that underlie this phenomenon that has plagued the world.

The author takes up the controversial issue of Islam and nationalism and calls for '*ijtihad*' or creative and imaginative thinking to come up with the answers. The concept of '*ummah*' or community is discussed in the context of its role in the modern pluralistic society of nation states. While acknowledging that Muslims were pioneers in such concepts as freedom, he highlights the fact that today there is a need to catch up with the rest of the world where there has been greater progress. The author also looks at relations between Islamic and non-Islamic states and the issue of minorities in the modern Islamic state.

On the issue of women's rights the author points out that ironically while Islam accords rights to women, the male dominated society denies her these rights. According to the author, women in Islam are justly fighting feudal practices which are unfortunately continuing in some Islamic countries. The author passionately believes that the Quran asserts women's rights and it is only an emphasis on feudal practices rather than the teachings of the Quran that has led to the present backward condition of Muslim women.

There is a very interesting chapter devoted to economic justice in Islam. Here the author points out the Quranic concept of non-exploitative relationship between human beings as an important contribution to ethical and economic theory. Here the author argues clearly and logically for the fact that the Quran stands forever on the side of the economically exploited and oppressed people of the society. Further, in an interesting chapter on the intellectual approach to Islam the author emphasizes the need to

synthesize intellect and compassion to find answers to the problems that beset the Muslim world today.

It is, indeed, a thought-provoking book that makes us look at the most contentious issues of recent times relating to Islam and the Muslim community. It is an interesting encounter with an intellectual who has a vision for the Islamic world, and I recommend it to the members of the wider public who want to understand and appreciate the core of Islamic life and doctrine from a modern perspective.

Khalid Ahmed Mecci

Joseph Kaipayil, ***Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay,*** Bangalore: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy, 2002, pages x + 55, ISBN: 81-87664-02-9.

Joseph Kaipayil's recent book, *Critical Ontology*, is an insightful work dealing with the place of critical ontology in a world of philosophy in general. But it is not just finding a place for ontology among other sections of philosophy. Rather the book intends to see "Philosophy itself as critical ontology" (ix). In other words, it is a philosophical perspective by which we see "any given philosophical problem from its being-principle" (ix).

The book has three chapters dealing with philosophy in general (chapter 1), critical ontology in particular (chapter 2) and search into Being as revealed in itself, in the world and in the human self (chapter 3).

In the first chapter, the Nature and Task of Philosophy, Kaipayil introduces philosophy as a critical reflection on Being. By the word 'critical' the author means subject "to further questioning" (3). Philosophy is not dogmatic conclusions but results of intense search, which never stops. Openness to further explorations is the most salutary characteristic of genuine philosophy. By this understanding the author rules out any room for totalitarianism or dogmatism from the world of critical ontology. This chapter goes into the details of different sections or types of

philosophy with a critical judgment over them. He carefully distinguishes philosophy from religion, art and literature. "Religion is based on faith whereas philosophy is based on critical reflection" (4). Similarly "In art and literature the appeal is to emotions and feelings, whereas in philosophy the primary appeal is to human reason" (6). That the art has a sensory appeal along with its intelligent content is undoubtful. All philosophy should be based on human experience; the critical reflection over this by the human mind makes philosophy possible. Experience, analysis and formulation are the inner core of any philosophical theory. Since philosophy is not a dogmatic dead-end to the searching mind "pluralism in philosophy is a necessity" (17). The purpose of a philosophical theory is to give some meaning to one's own human existence. Critical reflection unveils values and makes our lives worth living.

In the next chapter, the author turns to his favourite expression "Critical Ontology" and tries to look at the entire philosophy from this prism of ontology, that is '*logos*' of '*on*', science of being. Such a philosophy must be purified from the undue mixture of other trends of philosophy, such as anthropology, psychology, ethics and even from epistemology. The main reason for this is, all these specific functions or aspects of the human reality are legitimately to be known by their own proper titles. The word philosophy is more appropriate to the critical reflection on being as such. Thus, the philosopher may consider ethics as a "being-problem," but not a moral problem. "If epistemology and ethics emerge as separate subjects, what is left to philosophy is metaphysics only" (23). But the sad thing is that there are philosophers who think metaphysics is not at all necessary. This problem is brushed aside as a case of misunderstanding of true metaphysics.

In this second chapter the author develops also his favourite doctrine of "being-principle." The being-principle of an entity "is the reason (cause) of its beingness itself. It is around this principle a particular entity is organized" (29). Each being has its own being-principle. The "ontic commitment" one has to the being-principle of any being, keeps philosophy a dynamic search forever and makes it Critical Ontology. "An ontology solidly established on critical reflection on the empirical and yet transcending the empirical in search of the being-principles of things is what we call Critical Ontology" (33).

In the third chapter, the method of critical ontology is especially applied to the world and the human being. The being-principle of the world is not the totality of the being-principles of all beings in the world, but the Supreme Being as such, which we may call God. The being-principles are subject to gradation in their beingness. Thus, varieties of existence with less or more perfection in their beingness are possible. "The Supreme Being principle has its fullness of beingness" (42). The Supreme Being constitutes the beings in the world, allowing their being to be, according to the being-principle of each entity, which is somehow pre-existing in the Supreme (49). The Supreme Being does so due to its true nature of self-giving. On the other hand, the world operates through its own cosmological principles such as, the principle of causality, unity (uniformity), dynamism and gradation. The human being is very much part of this world, yet due to the excellence of its being-principle, is characterized by self-transcendence and an inward orientation to the Supreme.

In presenting philosophy as Critical Ontology, Kaipayil has done a noble search into the nature of being and its innermost dynamics of constitution and operation. In spite of the subtlety of the subject, the author with his clarity of articulation blesses us with an easy reading.

His critical look on other authors (e.g., Kant, Heidegger) is welcome. However, it should be remembered that what we say is only a vision from our own perspective. To think that reason knows everything is a western passion in philosophy. In the East it is much different. Both seers in the East and saints of the church (e.g., John of the Cross) teaches us very well how we have to abandon our intellect and make room for faith to know the reality of God and his reflection in nature. Our reason is a very lower level of knowing. Take, for example, our knowledge of the thing-in-itself. In spite of all arguments in favour of reason, what we ultimately say is: "there must be something corresponding to what we see outside." What is this something? Seers and saints relish this "unseen and un-understood" thing in itself by faith to which all philosophy should finally submit. Kant's practical reason is certainly not Christian faith, but is a pointer for us to think that there is a way of knowing which is higher than the knowing by pure reason.

V. F. Vineeth

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